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SFX

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116 PAGES OF GHOSTS, MONSTERS, DEMONS, ZOMBIES, VAMPIRES AND THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT!

FEATURING:
SMILE 2
THE RADLEYS
INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE
THE MUNSTERS
SALEM'S LOT

WORLD EXCLUSIVE!

TERRIFIER 3

ON SET WITH ART THE CLOWN & CO

EXCLUSIVE NEWS! | BRAND NEW PHOTOS! | BEHIND THE SCENES ACCESS!

PLUS! HELLBOY | A QUIET PLACE | FROM | HALLOWEEN HORROR NIGHTS | GREMLINS | BEING HUMAN
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Test your knowledge of all matters Alan Moore.

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Drilling down deep into *At The Earth's Core*.

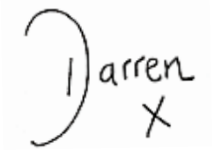
Captain's Log

When I say that being on set for *Terrifier 3* was the most fun I've ever had on a production, I don't say it lightly. I've been *very* fortunate to go behind the scenes over the years and it's always a fascinating experience that I'm very grateful to be able to have. But I've never been made more welcome or enjoyed myself so much as that day in an unassuming Staten Island venue.

You might think that because *Terrifier* leans towards the more... *extreme* elements of supernatural horror that the team behind it would be a little intense. Nothing could be further from the truth – they really are like a family, bursting with in-jokes and love for the project and each other. So kind and so generous with their time – the director, Damien Leone, even took a break from filming one of the most complicated kill scenes to chat with me for SFX. There was me just expecting to hide in the corner and speak to everyone weeks later about what I'd seen.

So that old cliche of 'never judge a book by its cover' definitely rings true once more. Particularly if you find the cover of this issue of SFX – my favourite edition of each year! – a little too much, you'll find a lot of love and affection has gone on behind the scenes so that we can celebrate horror once more this Halloween.

Normal service will be resumed next month... Happy Halloween – see you in four spooky weeks!



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Rants & Raves

Inside the *SFX* hive mind

DARREN SCOTT EDITOR

RAVES

→ Absolutely *loved* Halloween Horror Nights – my favourite houses were the originals. There's a whole series of shows and films waiting to happen!

→ *Salem's Lot* is *brilliant*. Why it sat on a shelf for years is anyone's guess.

RANTS

→ Could time just slow down a little bit so I can catch up on all the genre films and series?

→ Support film magazines – you'll miss them when they're gone. Yes, that means you too, film PR teams!

IAN BERRIMAN DEPUTY EDITOR

RAVES

→ For the benefit of anyone who's unaware: Jonathan Miller's fantastic 1966 version of *Alice In Wonderland* is now on iPlayer. A trip down the rabbit hole is strongly recommended.

→ Penguin's new Weird Fiction range is intriguing – there are some well-known names among the first five titles (Algernon Blackwood, William Hope Hodgson), but I'd never heard of Gertrude Barrows Bennett's 1948 novel *Claimed!*

→ Liking the sound of violist Hugo Max's Silent Cinema tour (6 October-2 November), which will see him accompanying B&W horror classics like *Der Golem*, *Häxan* and *Nosferatu*. Check out hugomax.co.uk for full details.

JONATHAN COATES ART EDITOR

RAVES

→ Season two of *The Power Of The Rings* has been amazing! Particularly enjoyed Rory Kinnear as Tom Bombadil - that accent! The revamped titles look great too!

ED RICKETTS PRODUCTION EDITOR

RAVES

→ Looking forward to season three of *FROM*, and actually quite surprised it's made it this far, given the lack of hype.

→ Is it worth spending £40 on Corgi's forthcoming reissue of their 1966 Batmobile (with firing rockets and pop-out chain slasher blade), just to have the "classic recreation packaging"? Sorely tempted. (See bit.ly/corgibat)

NICK SETCHFIELD EDITOR AT LARGE

RAVES

→ Currently reading Ian Fleming: The Complete Man by Nicholas Shakespeare. A fascinating look at the man behind Bond but so exhaustive I feel like I'm living his life in real time...

→ Enjoyed *The Twelve Maidens* on Radio 4 Extra, a serial from 1971 that mixed a rich brew of science, black magic and Martin Jarvis.

TARA BENNETT US EDITOR

RAVES

→ Peacock's *Teacup* is my non-traditional Halloween scary treat. Great performances, smart, and loaded with surprises you won't see coming.

→ Excited for more unconventional animation this fall with *Flow*. If you're lamenting original stories (and execution) on the big screen, turn your head towards animation!

THE FUTURE FIRST!

Red Alert

NOVEMBER 2024

→ NEWS //// INTERVIEWS //// INSIGHT //// POPCORN!

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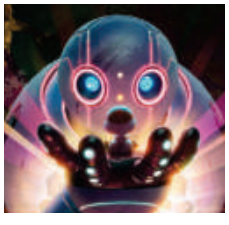
RECOVERED TREASURE

The *Tomb Raider* franchise fights back

Highlights



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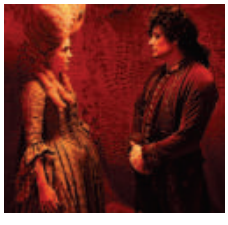
THE WILD ROBOT

→ Peter Brown's novels are brought to life via animation and a starry cast.



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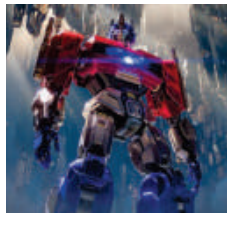
TIMESTALKER

→ Live, laugh, love – DIE. But then come back again. And again... in Alice Lowe's new film.



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TRANSFORMERS ONE

→ Could this origin prequel really be the best *Transformers* movie ever?

Roz (Lupita Nyong'o) and Brightbill (Kit Connor).

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

A New Frontier

DreamWorks brings CG animation full circle with **The Wild Robot**

WORDS: **CLARISSE LOUGHREY**

DURING ONE OF PEDRO PASCAL'S final recording sessions for his role in DreamWorks Animation's *The Wild Robot*, he turned to its writer-director Chris Sanders and confessed: "You know, I'm more *me* in this role than a lot I've done in the past."

Pascal voices a fox called Fink, one of the many critter residents of an uninhabited isle. When he encounters a crash-landed robot named ROZZUM unit 7134 (Lupita Nyong'o) – "Roz" for short – he reluctantly volunteers to help her raise an orphaned gosling she comes to name Brightbill (Kit Connor).

Fink is as charming as can be, a disarming collision of world-weariness and childish mischief. And for anyone who's followed the actor's nitro-fuelled career of late, as he descends from a galaxy far, far away to battle Paul Mescal in the arena for *Gladiator II* and slip on the spandex for Marvel's *Fantastic Four*, all while winning over the internet's hearts and minds – well, Fink sounds like Pascal to a tee.

"He showed us the way character-wise," Sanders tells Red Alert. "There's a line – not in the film – that we recorded: 'Ooh, can we get that?' But the way he read it, he said it like a little kid at a grocery store pointing at something and everything just lit up for me at that point. We really found a lot of Pedro in there."

Each and every creature Roz befriends is shaped, in some way, by the actor who plays them. Their voices are instantly recognisable: Catherine O'Hara's frenzied chatter as Pinktail, a harried opossum mother of many; Bill Nighy's courtly airs as Longneck, the leader of a goose flock; Stephanie Hsu's bright tones as Vontra, a robot built by the same company as Roz, dispatched on a retrieval mission.

Ving Rhames plays Thunderbolt, a drillmaster of a falcon. Mark Hamill is Thorn, a slumberous bear. And then there's Matt Berry as Paddler, a rather single-minded beaver. Berry, it turns out, is a favourite actor of Peter Brown, the author behind *The Wild Robot*'s

Fink the fox is voiced by Pedro Pascal. Aww.

Roz and Brightbill have a lovely snuggle.

source material, a 2016 illustrated novel of the same name. His wife had urged him to ask DreamWorks to cast the *What We Do In The Shadows* star. Brown, however, didn't want to step on any toes. Yet, somehow, it's as if they'd read his mind. The actor's an ideal fit for a mammal pompously, delusionally committed to gnawing through a tree trunk roughly 20 times his size.

The Wild Robot is set in a future in which humanity has cocooned itself away in domed utopian cities, but has lost its connection with nature. "Peter's story is deceptively powerful," Sanders adds. Roz was created for that human world, controlled and artificial, but ends up somewhere "wild and chaotic and dangerous". It's up to her to adapt. Or, in turn, for the animals to consider a new way to be. "Fink has this wonderful conversation with Roz where he says, 'Look, you've got to learn how things work on the island. Kindness is not a survival skill.' He has to win, or he doesn't see another day," Sanders explains. "What Roz presents to them is a different way of surviving. She leads by example."

Part of the challenge of making *The Wild Robot* was finding a visual identity distinct from Brown's evocative, Scandi-woodcut style. DreamWorks' ethos became sophistication through simplicity. And no one's quite mastered that balance like Studio Ghibli's Hayao Miyazaki, whose films *Laputa: Castle In The Sky* and *Princess Mononoke* beautifully blend the natural and the mechanical.

He was a guiding light for the film's animators. "I was able to actually meet Mr Miyazaki one time," Sanders says. "It's one of my most cherished memories. He is definitely an inspiration for me, and for every artist that worked on this film."

With nods, too, to the floral palette of French impressionist Claude Monet, the film continues the studio's return to a painterly style, already seen in 2022's *The Bad Guys* and *Puss In Boots: The Last Wish*. "Every surface in this film, including the animals, is hand-painted," the director notes. "They are painted digitally, but they are done by hand, by people. This film has brought CG full circle back to where animation began."

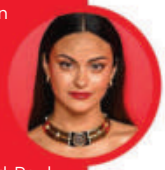
But at its heart is Roz – and at Roz's heart is Nyong'o. "She took this film very seriously," Sanders says. "We worked very hard, through many recording sessions, to not only literally find that voice but to find the character. Not only is Lupita an amazing actor, but she is a great storyteller."

It's been a once in a lifetime collaboration for Sanders, whose credits include *Lilo & Stitch*, *How To Train Your Dragon* and *The Croods*. "I'm getting all emotional now because I don't want it to end," he says. "As a filmmaker, I've enjoyed this more than anything I've ever worked on."

The Wild Robot is in cinemas from 18 October.

SCI-FACT! **"Rozzum" is a nod to *RUR* (*Rossum's Universal Robots*), the 1920 play which coined the word "robot".**

NEWS WARP
HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION



STEPHANE CARDINALE/CORBIS/GETTY

→ Alison Brie is Evil-Lyn and Camila Mendes is Teela in the live-action **Masters Of The Universe** movie.

→ Jack Black and Paul Rudd in the frame for a reimagining of 1997's **Anaconda**.

→ Wes Ball to direct big-screen version of cyberpunk video game **Ruiner**.

→ *Suspiria*'s Luca Guadagnino linked to DC's World War Two hero **Sgt Rock**.

→ Sir Ian McKellen wanted for Gandalf in Andy Serkis's **The Lord Of The Rings: The Hunt For Gollum**.

→ Vin Diesel reuniting with writer-director David Twohy on **Riddick: Furya**.

→ Rebecca Ferguson and Andrew Garfield starring in adaptation of Enid Blyton's **The Magic Faraway Tree**.

→ Sega videogame **Eternal Champions** heading to the screen, written by *Jurassic World*'s Derek Connolly.

→ Neil Blomkamp's **Alpha** to star Aaron Paul as a death row inmate turned apex predator.

→ *Wolf Creek*'s Greg McLean to write and direct Biblical-era horror **The First Exorcist**, with a shoot next year.

SCI-FACT! **Dynamite is also releasing a series of collections of Now and Dark Horse's *Terminator* comics from the '80s and '90s.**

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Robot Wars

Declan Shalvey on bringing **The Terminator** back to comics

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**

Cover art by Declan Shalvey.

COINCIDING WITH ITS FORTIETH anniversary, Dynamite Entertainment is bringing the Terminator back to comics for the first time in five years, with a new monthly series by writer Declan Shalvey and artist Luke Sparrow.

"I was surprised when I was offered it as I couldn't think of the last time I'd seen the franchise in comics," Shalvey tells Red Alert. "It had definitely been a while, so I was intrigued. Much like when I worked on *Alien* at Marvel, with *Terminator* I was a big fan of the first couple of films, which are specifically iconic for me."

In line with the instructions of licensor StudioCanal, the series takes place within the continuity of 1984's debut instalment. "Which is fine by me because the core concept is so strong and there's lots to play with," says Shalvey. "I find limitations helpful, as it gives me a clearer roadmap and stops me crumbling under the weight of years of different stories and adaptations. So it feels like our book is more pure in that way."

Shalvey likes it "when done-in-one comics are well executed", and most issues are self-contained and focus on a separate cast of characters. "Since the series is dealing with the core concept and not decades-long lore, the single stories offer us a chance to play with that concept more," he explains. "The format definitely suits comics, which is very much an episodic medium when it comes to monthly books, and I wanted to lean into that. We all know what the T-800 is, so let's take it and each issue put it into environments that we don't expect to see it in."

With Skynet targeting different points in the past after failing to kill Sarah and John Connor, Shalvey and Sparrow are provided with the opportunity to explore a variety of locations and eras. "The first issue follows an elderly couple who have managed to live a safe and isolated life away from the War With The Machines, but that is about to end, while the second issue sees the T-800 appear in Vietnam as the conflict falls apart.

"So we're going to see it try to complete its objectives in times and places we could never expect," continues Shalvey, who reveals that an overarching storyline will eventually emerge. "Without giving anything away, there is an overall connective tissue to all the stories, but that won't become clear until we're further into the series."

While Shalvey supplies covers, he is enjoying collaborating with Luke Sparrow. "Luke is a wonderful artist who excels at depicting characters and environments which, to me, will be the bedrock to making this an interesting book," he says. "His attention to detail is phenomenal and I'm floored by the dedication he's showing on every page.

"He's channelling all the mood and pacing I've been hoping to see in this book and delivering more on top of that."

The Terminator issue one is out on 9 October.

Cover art by Phil Noto.

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Desert Storm

Star Wars' lost war comes to comics in **The Battle Of Jakku**

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**

HAVING RECENTLY concluded its post-*Empire Strikes Back* storylines, Marvel's *Star Wars* line is now moving onto the perhaps even more intriguing gap between 1983's *Return Of The Jedi* and 2015's *The Force Awakens*, initially focusing on the decisive but previously unchronicled final showdown between the Galactic Empire and the New Republic.

Illustrated by Leonard Kirk, Stefano Raffaele and Jethro Morales, *The Battle Of Jakku* plays out in a trilogy of weekly, four-issue miniseries, beginning in October's "Insurgency Rising" before continuing in November's "Republic Under Siege".

"I've always been fascinated by lost or unexplored pockets of time in the *Star Wars* mythos and this is as big as that gets!" says writer Alex Segura, who wrote 2020 YA novel *Poe Dameron: Free Fall* and Marvel's 2023 one-shot *Return Of The Jedi: Rebellion*. He describes that as "a lot of fun, as it happens right before the Battle of Endor, so that felt like a nice primer for this."

While he adheres to the known lore, Segura had plenty of freedom in exactly how he interprets what unfolds. "Like anything else, you want to make sure you nod to established canon and events while also adding your own voice and interests," he adds. "But I felt like everyone was really receptive to new ideas and seeing established things differently, so the question became what can I add to this monumental moment to increase the stakes and perhaps give readers a perspective they didn't know they were missing?"

Admitting that he "chuckles at the idea of it being research, because these are things I'd read anyway", Segura immersed himself in reference book *Star Wars: Timelines* in addition to rereading Chuck Wendig's *Aftermath* novels. "For starters, I wanted to get a sense of what happened when and where the players were," he says. "I also revisited the original trilogy to get a sense of scope and tone. In some ways, I want this to feel like a lost 'fourth' instalment of that saga, as this is a rare chance to tell a story with so many iconic characters."

Segura confirms that "we'll see a lot of familiar faces – some unexpected, some obscure – but we'll also have a lot of new characters that play off our heroes as well that I hope will linger.

"Luke – who forms a new Jedi Order – Leia, Han, Chewbacca and Doctor Aphra are all involved. One of the challenges is striking a balance between giving the recognisable heroes their time but also finding room for new additions to the mythos, whether it's a character or a setting. The main villain, meanwhile, has a mysterious link to Darth Vader.

"It's too early to get into the plot [of "Insurgency Rising"] and how it rolls into the next few minis, but readers will be introduced to a relatively new threat," adds Segura. "The story is very much about that threat's arc and how it plays into the earliest days of the New Republic."

Star Wars: The Battle Of Jakku – Insurgency Rising is out on 2 October.

SCI-FACT! **The Battle of Jakku was first mentioned in *The Force Awakens*, with Rey scavenging wreckage from it on her desert home planet.**

A feisty Lara Croft, voiced by Hayley Atwell.

SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

Raiders Of The Lost Arc

Lara Croft is back globetrotting, anime style, in new Netflix series **Tomb Raider: The Legend Of Lara Croft** WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**

YOU MIGHT WANT TO SIT down... We've found proof that obsessive gaming can be a very good thing. A few years ago, screenwriter Tasha Huo (*The Witcher: Blood Origin*) was playing the latest Lara Croft videogame, *Shadow Of The Tomb Raider* (2018).

She was so impressed with the gameplay, story and graphics that she turned to social media to "relentlessly" post about her progress. A producer friend saw this and reached out for a meeting, asking her to pitch her take for a Netflix anime series centred on the character of Lara Croft.

While Crystal Dynamics' British archaeologist has been an action-adventure gaming icon for almost 30 years, there's always been an issue with how much story you can cram into videogame cut-scenes and game play when she's continually shooting, jumping, rapelling and running.

Meanwhile, the movie adaptations have just been middling to downright bad, leaving a lot of juicy Croft story left withering on the vine. Huo knew that and pitched to Netflix a very character-driven Croft series that explores, as she tells Red Alert, "Who she is, why she is, and what makes her tick? All the sorts of things that are left lingering when you're playing the game."

Netflix, Crystal Dynamics and Legendary agreed, making Huo the showrunner of the first anime take on the character in *Tomb Raider: The Legend Of Lara Croft*. Animated by Powerhouse Animation Studios (*Castlevania*), the series follows the 2013 reboot storyline, and takes place after the events of the 2018 platform game.

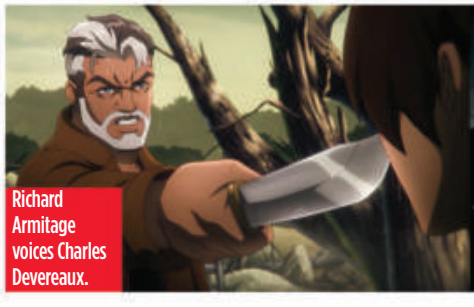
Huo says she was given broad permission to mine the Croft lore, so she found herself going back to small moments that grabbed her while playing the games. "I'm always drawn by things that are like throwaway lines," she says. "Like when she says she used to be a bouncer, and I was like, 'Wait, what?'

"It's those little comments, even from the early games, and little jokes she might make that clearly hint at a story somewhere in her past. A lot of this show was thinking about what are some of the backstories of those really key moments so that, when she becomes Lara from the '90s classic era, you get why she would have said those things."

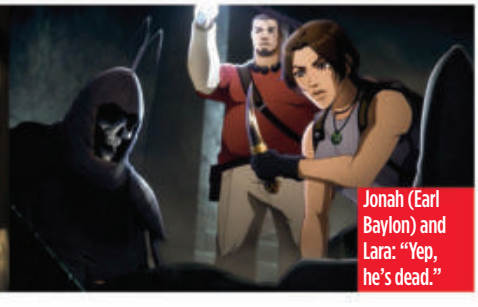
In terms of when to set the series, Huo says she was particularly drawn to Lara's attitude at the end of *Shadow*, where she's ready to usher in an apocalypse because she's feeling so low. "I always knew that we were going to start the show at her low point and have the fun of getting to see all those layers of joy that get brought back into her to form her into the woman we grew up with in the game."

As for the best actress to embody this complex Croft, Huo says Hayley Atwell (*Agent Carter*) was always the ideal first choice in her head. "I absolutely thought she would say no," Huo laughs. "I honestly didn't know who would be on a back-up list, so I'm so grateful she said yes, because I think Hayley, as a person, really embodies this part of Lara."

When it came to the ensemble cast, Huo says she looked to the games to pull out established



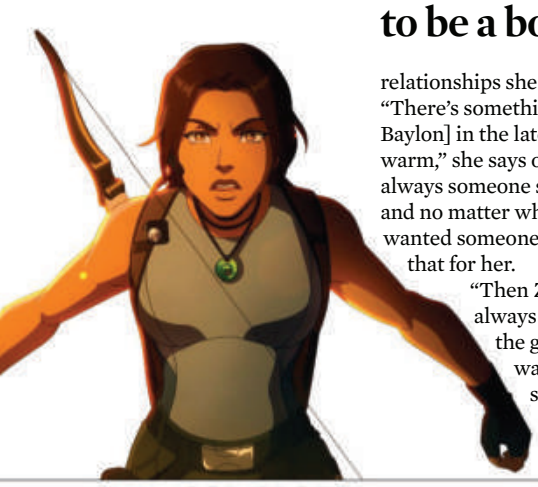
Richard Armitage voices Charles Devereaux.



Jonah (Earl Baylon) and Lara: "Yep, he's dead."

"Might just have a quick raid of this tomb."

> **"I'm always drawn by throwaway lines, like when she says she used to be a bouncer"**



relationships she could build out in the show. "There's something about Jonah Maiava [Earl Baylon] in the later games that was homey and warm," she says of his inclusion. "He was always someone she could just tell anything to, and no matter what, he would love her. I really wanted someone in her camp who could be that for her.

"Then Zip [Allen Maldonado] was always really fun," she continues. "In the games, he's the person who was like, 'Lara, I don't think you should do that!' and the funny guy in the chair." And that's not all we can expect: "There definitely are a lot of the characters that I love the most who will find their way into the show at some point. But also, it was a really great opportunity to create new people to expand Lara's world."

One of them being the show's antagonist, a mysterious explorer known as Devereaux (Richard Armitage). "I always knew I wanted Lara to be up against someone who's dealing with the same thing she's dealing with," she says of this mystery man. "It was always going to be someone who had similar issues to Lara and was choosing to build a dark and angry path.

"The beauty of this particular arch-nemesis is that he is very tempting," she adds. "He does really see her for who she is, and there is something that you're drawn to in someone who's like that, which in itself can be scary."

Tomb Raider: The Legend Of Lara Croft is on Netflix from 10 October.

SCI-FACT! **The "four perils" myth at the centre of this season's quest is pulled from Chinese mythology.**

NEWS WARP
HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

- James Spader voicing Ultron in Marvel's **Vision** series, with *Star Trek: Picard*'s Todd Stashwick also onboard.
- *Bridgerton*'s Charithra Chandran joining **One Piece** season two as Miss Wednesday.
- **Star Wars: The Acolyte** cancelled after one season.
- Nicholas Denton to lead Anne Rice's **The Talamasca**.
- **Pacific Rim** prequel series in development.
- Disney+ developing YA take on **The Phantom Of The Opera**.
- South London superhero saga **Supacell** renewed for a second season.
- Alfred Molina, Alfre Woodard, Geena Davis and Bill Pullman joining supernatural mystery **The Boroughs** from the Duffer Brothers.
- Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight*-adjacent **Midnight Sun** to get animated adaptation.
- **Dark Matter** renewed for a second season on Apple TV+.
- DC's **Creature Commandos** 'toon premieres 5 December.
- Brad Kane new showrunner on *Friday The 13th* prequel series **Crystal Lake**.
- **Dead Boy Detectives** dead on Netflix.

JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC/GETTY

SCI-FACT! **Cinemark has also recently released popcorn buckets of Pennywise and Chucky, but these are only available in cinemas.**

BUCKETS OF GORE

Time to find a friend who'll happily send a head in the mail for you – Art the Clown has been immortalised as a popcorn bucket, but only in the US. You can order one at **cinemarkterrifier.com** if stocks last!

GORE BLIMEY!

This month marks the 50th anniversary of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* – which means it's time to add another version of the movie to your collection. This deluxe set comes housed in a replica of the chainsaw from the film. Yes, it makes the sounds. As well as a 4K UHD version, Blu-ray and bonus disc – including two brand new documentaries – the $300 set also comes with an exclusive VHS of the film. Only available in the US and limited to 5,000 copies. Time to hit up those US friends again... Pre-order at **darkskyselects.com.**

GORE TITLES

There's a slew of movies relevant to *SFX* readers at the 68th BFI London Film Festiva (9-20 October). The Gala movie is Amy Adams's *Nightbitch*, about a woman who turns into a dog. Other titles of note include Irish folk horror *Frewaka*, Spanish chiller *The Wailing* and French horror-comedy *The Balconettes*. **Visit bfi.org.uk.**

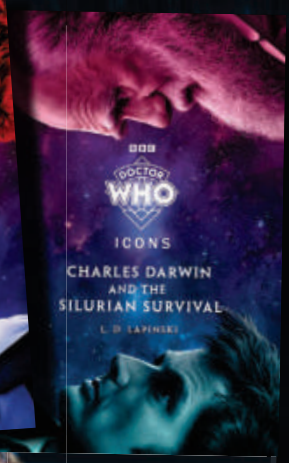
Nightbitch. (We're so sorry, Amy.)

The Wailing. Must be bin day.

Frewaka. Talk about being cross-eyed!

The Balconettes. Three of 'em.

The cast of *The War Between The Land And The Sea.*



Anna Lundberg and Georgia Tennant.

SFX

SPACE AND TIME

NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF DOCTOR WHO

◆ More cast for the new *Doctor Who* spin-off *The War Between The Land And The Sea* have been announced. Ruth Madeley and Colin McFarlane will reprise their roles as UNIT's Shirley Anne Bingham and Torchwood's General Pierce, alongside the previously announced Russell Tovey, Gugu Mbatha-Raw, Jemma Redgrave and Alexander Devrient. The five-part drama is currently filming in various locations.

◆ **Covers for two of the Icons book series have been released. *Frida Kahlo And The Skull Children* by Sophie McKenzie is published on 24 October by Penguin, with *Charles Darwin And The Silurian Survival* by LD Lapinski following on 21 November. A third volume is planned for March.**

◆ The Fifteenth Doctor's sonic screwdriver has been made available for purchase after previously being a SDCC exclusive. The "hi-spec electro-plated version" is only available via the Character Options website. A standard version of the sonic – with "a painted finish" and more basic functions – is available from other retailers.

◆ **A celebration of the music of *Doctor Who* was held at the Royal Albert Hall on Monday 26 August as part of the BBC Proms. Prom 47 and 48 (a matinee and evening performance) was hosted by Catherine Tate and included appearances from Anita Dobson and Jinkx Monsoon. Broadcast live on BBC Radio 3 and iPlayer, the Prom was filmed and will be shown in December.**

◆ Three full-cast live performances of 25th anniversary Big Finish story "The Stuff Of Legend" were staged at Cadogan Hall in London on 14 and 15 September. The studio recording, starring Paul McGann, is available now and a live recording will be available later this year.

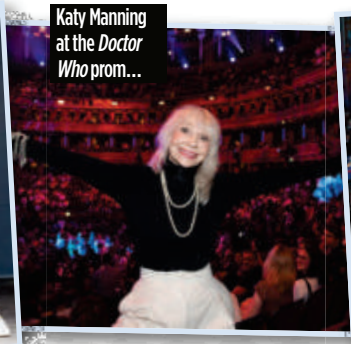
◆ **McGann is reunited not only with India Fisher and Jaye Griffiths for three new audio stories in *The Eighth Doctor Adventures: Deadly Strangers*, releasing in December, but with the writer of his *Who* TV debut. Matthew Jacobs has penned "Puccini And The Doctor" – his first time writing for any *Doctor Who* media since the 1996 TV Movie.**

◆ Also from Big Finish, "Jenny – The Doctor's Daughter: Saving Time" is released this month. Starring alongside Georgia Tennant as Jenny are Stuart Milligan as Garundel and Simon Fisher-Becker as Dorium Maldovar.

Doctor Who is on BBC iPlayer (UK) and Disney+ (global).

IMAGES: BBC, BIG FINISH, ANDY PARADISE, ALISTAIR HEAP

The cast of "The Stuff Of Legend".



Katy Manning at the *Doctor Who* prom...

...which was hosted by Catherine Tate.

SCI-FACT! **The Sixth Doctor met Charles Darwin and the Silurians in a 2001 Big Finish adventure called "Bloodtide".**

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

Stalk This Way

Genre auteur Alice Lowe talks about her new timey-wimey romcom **Timestalker** WORDS: **STEVE O'BRIEN**

Alice Lowe as one of the period era Agneses.

Nick Frost plays Regency Agnes's nasty husband.

Another time period, another problem...

"LIKE A SCREWED-UP *DOCTOR Who*," is how actor/writer/director Alice Lowe describes her latest film, a bruise-black romcom about a woman named Agnes who repeatedly falls for the wrong guy, dies a horrible death, and gets reincarnated a century or so later, before the whole grisly cycle starts over again.

Timestalker is another characteristically left-field idea from the woman who brought us the similarly deranged pregnancy horror *Prevenge* in 2016. And though it's moderately more accessible than her splattery debut, it's not what you'd necessarily call commercial.

"I wanted to be ambitious with the film," Lowe tells Red Alert, "because I know how unusual it is to get to make a movie, and I felt like, surely I'm at the point now where I can compromise less about what I want to do. That means that it is a risk for financiers, because it is so singular as a vision."

Though *Timestalker* isn't a time travel story as such, the various time periods (the film pings from 1688 to 1793 to 1847 to 1980 to 2117) all intersect with each other, with recurring echoes and motifs. Lowe says she chose time periods that show "the evolution of our idea of romance".

"That was the reasoning," she says, "but it was also because I like all of those eras. I think we're under the illusion that filmmakers are supposed to serve the public, and Christopher Nolan is doing some sort of great service to the public by making *Oppenheimer*. And you're like, 'I think he just likes bombs, and he just wanted to put them in a film.' And I think that's okay. To me, the more specific something is, the more universal it is."

As such, *Timestalker* incorporates elements from not just Lowe's favourite films, but many pieces of music, books and art that have caught her eye over the years. "Every single scene has got a painting that influences it, or a book or 10 books, or 10 paintings or 10 films," she says.

"There's also those big, sweeping romance films *Gone With The Wind* and *Dr Zhivago* in there, and also Powell and Pressburger, because to me their style is so theatrical and fantastical.

"There aren't many people doing stuff that's pure fantasy, when you're telling the audience this isn't real," she continues. "That's what I wanted to do with the colour choices in the film and the theatricality of it: that as soon as you watch it, you're like, 'Oh, this isn't trying to be real, it's not trying to be an accurate historical depiction of something. It's a fantasy.'"

Lowe fans will recognise many faces from

Who'd be a woman in 1688... in Salem?

Agnes gets woo'd with beau Aneurin Barnard.

her previous movie, including Kate Dickie, Mike Wozniak and Dan Renton Skinner, while Aneurin Barnard (*Doctor Who*'s Roger ap Gwilliam) is the object of Agnes's desire in each time period, and *Interview With The Vampire*'s Jacob Anderson is a character that follows the various Agneses around. Nick Frost, who Lowe co-starred with in *Hot Fuzz*, also pops up as Regency Agnes's brutish husband.

"I really feel like everyone attached was fated to do it," she says. "I mean, you have to know what you're getting into to do an independent film [the movie was shot in just 22 days], and especially one this mad. It was amazing to have someone like Nick Frost come in, because his understanding of the character was so complete."

There was an eight-year gap between Lowe's first and second films, but she says she doesn't intend as long a wait for her third movie. However, a mooted biopic of BBC Radiophonic Workshop whizz (and arranger of the original *Doctor Who* theme tune) Delia Derbyshire, which was intended at one point to be Lowe's second feature, has been put on the back burner.

> **"There aren't many people doing stuff when you're telling the audience this isn't real"**

"I don't know if that's the right film to be doing as my next movie, because it's so niche," she explains. "Sometimes projects go away, then come back as different incarnations, which I think is kind of what happened with *Timestalker*. I didn't make a film about Delia Derbyshire, but I did make a film about a female time traveller, so they're sort of connected."

She can't talk about the next film she has planned, but teases that it's "a very twisted psychological horror" and she's keen, she admits, to do a proper science fiction movie, albeit one with an Alice Lowe twist.

"I'd love to do more sci-fi," she says, "but I never want to feel like I'm starting to apply the rules of a genre to something. I prefer to think of whatever I'm doing as its own thing, and if it happens to fall into that bracket, that's fine."

Timestalker is in cinemas from 11 October.

SCI-FACT! **Lowe plays a character called Captain Kransky in Duncan Jones's forthcoming *Rogue Trooper* movie.**

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

I, Robot(s)

How the makers of **Transformers One** gave the classic robots newfound heart WORDS: **STUART MANNING**

THE *TRANSFORMERS* FRANCHISE is going back to the beginning for its latest instalment; *Transformers One* tells the story of how robot good-guy Optimus Prime and villain Megatron went from best-bud bromance to bitter adversaries, in a new CG-animated feature film from Josh Cooley, director of *Toy Story 4*.

Cooley grew up watching the '80s Saturday morning cartoon. "My favourite was Optimus Prime," he says. "I wanted to capture the feeling I had playing with those toys, watching the cartoon. Not so much exactly what happened, but my *memory* of it – the joy I felt, and that feeling that anything is possible."

Earlier drafts of the screenplay took a lighter approach, but Cooley and producer Lorenzo di Bonaventura found themselves drawn to the tragic backstory of Optimus and D-16 (later to become Megatron), pitted on a journey of discovery about their homeworld of Cybertron. "The thing that really evolved during the development was the notion that you could feel badly for the villain," says di Bonaventura, who has worked across the entire modern *Transformers* franchise. "I love the fact they fall out over philosophy. They're both betrayed by their society."

Cooley agrees: "It's like Cain and Abel – it's epic and timeless and almost biblical. I thought, if I could make a *Transformers* movie that just concentrated on the robots and could make people feel something for them, then that would be huge. So that was what I wanted to do... to get the camera in really close on these characters and see them think, make choices and express real human emotion."

With no earthbound locations or characters, Cooley knew he needed to find moments of heart amid the action and spectacle. "Scale is part of the DNA of *Transformers*," he explains. "But I loved the idea of telling a very personal story in an epic landscape. We looked at *Lawrence Of Arabia* for reference, *Ben-Hur*, *The Ten Commandments* – all those movies that are about relationships, but told on a grand scale."

Marvel's Chris Hemsworth gives voice to Optimus Prime, with *Godzilla Vs Kong*'s Brian Tyree Henry as D-16. "Knowing that they're going to become enemies at the end, they needed to be best friends at the beginning," says Cooley. "So it was important that we really liked those characters together. With Chris and

Scarlett Johansson voices Elita-1.

Elita-1, B-127, D-16/Megatron and Orion Pax/ Optimus Prime.

Laurence Fishburne plays Alpha Trion...

...Keegan-Michael Key is B-127, and...

...Isaac Singleton Jr is Darkwing.

Brian, they're just charming people from the second you meet them. They're so much fun to be around and have that quality that just *makes* some movie stars."

Rounding out the voice cast are big hitters Scarlett Johansson, John Hamm, Laurence Fishburne and Steve Buscemi. "When I'm looking for an actor to play a role, I don't want them to be putting on a voice to do it," Cooley adds. "I want it to feel as natural as possible. I actually listen to a lot of interviews, as opposed to watching movies, because I want to hear their natural voice, to see who they really are. On this film, with our characters, I think the charm of every single one of them comes through."

The director was also keen to bring a human quality to the character movements on screen, giving the juvenile robot leads an endearing teenage-style gait and other foibles. "I'd always say to the animators, 'Please bring something that surprises me.' That could be something as simple as brushing something off a shoulder – anything that would be natural for a human to do."

"When I'm looking for an actor to play a role, I don't want them to be putting on a voice"

Courtesy of Industrial Light & Magic, the Transformers' homeworld provides rich backdrops throughout, with epic Art Deco-inspired cityscapes, glass and crystalline deserts, and striated '80s-style sunsets pulled straight out of the graphics of an arcade game. "I didn't want it to be super-realistic, because the live-action ones do that so well," Cooley explains. "This is a chance to do something a little more stylised, but I didn't want it to be super-cartoony either. I wanted it to feel believable, like you can actually reach out and touch it... to forget that you're watching an animated movie and get lost in that world."

Apart from acting as an entry point for younger audiences to that world and the broader *Transformers* universe, Lorenzo di Bonaventura hopes that the new film will bring a new approach to the overall franchise.

"When you look at the live-action films, most of the humanity has been invested in the human characters," he suggests. "In this case, what was possible with the robots was suddenly wildly expanded. And that was unexpected. So we now have a different mandate for the robots."

Has he connected with his inner robot? "Now we've seen the level of humanity in this movie, I don't think we can go back."

Transformers One is in cinemas from 11 October.

SCI-FACT! **Need more toyetic robots in your life? Never fear – *Transformers One* is the first chapter of a projected origins trilogy.**

SCI-FACT! James Earl Jones played himself in *The Big Bang Theory* episode "The Convention Conundrum".

THE FINAL FRONTIER

JAMES EARL JONES 1931-2024

Remembering the voice of Vader

WORDS: **NICK SETCHFIELD**

James Earl Jones with Mark Hamill in 1987.

DAVE PROWSE GAVE DARTH Vader his commanding physicality, but James Earl Jones brought the Sith Lord's soul to the screen. Augmented by the steady, rhythmic gasp of a respirator, Jones's resonant basso profondo voice could be threatening or seductive, sly or vicious, the very essence of the Dark Side of the Force.

"I just consider myself to be special effects," the acclaimed actor once confessed. "That's how I approached it. I just sat there and had all the fun of playing my voice like an instrument."

Born in Arkabutla, Mississippi and raised in Michigan, Jones took to reciting poetry to overcome a stammer that had left him mute for much of his childhood. After studying drama he entered the theatre, making his Broadway debut in 1958. His first film part was airman Lothar Zogg in Stanley Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove* (1964) and he was Oscar-nominated for 1970's *The Great White Hope*.

Jones remembered he was paid just $7,000 to voice Vader and insisted on no on-screen credit for his iconic contribution until 1983's *Return Of The Jedi*.

He returned to the role in *Revenge Of The Sith*, *Rogue One* and *The Rise Of Skywalker* and also voiced the arch villain in the *Star Wars: Rebels* animated series.

Beyond Vader, Jones built a distinguished career on stage and screen, moving from Shakespeare to *Field Of Dreams*. Genre credits include 1975 TV movie *The UFO Incident*, playing real-life abductee claimant Barney Hill, and the sinister Thulsa Doom opposite Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Conan The Barbarian* (1982). He also served as narrator on *3rd Rock From The Sun* and fronted a one-off *Twilight Zone* in 1994.

"I feel lucky to have had any association with *Star Wars*," Jones once declared, "because it gave me exposure to another generation."

ASSOCIATED PRESS / ALAMY

JAMES DARREN 1936-2024

American actor known for *The Time Tunnel* and as Vic Fontaine in *Deep Space Nine*.

JOHN CASSADAY 1971-2024

American comic book artist known for *Planetary*, *Star Wars* and *Astonishing X-Men*.

NEW AUTHOR

JULIE LEONG

MEET THE "RECOVERING INVESTMENT BANKER" BEHIND *THE TELLER OF SMALL FORTUNES*

Tell us about your protagonist.
→ Tao is a twenty-something fortune teller who immigrated when she was young. Chafing against her new life, she ran away from home, and now travels the countryside telling small fortunes for small prices. It's a lonely existence – at least, until she meets a mercenary and a reformed thief...

How long did the book take to write?
→ The first draft appeared in a caffeine-fuelled whirlwind; I wrote the bulk of it in about a month (but believe me, that was all that I did that month). Revising took far longer, though while some aspects evolved, the story's core remains largely the same.

Did you have to do much research?
→ Not a ton! That's one benefit of fantasy – you get to make up the world as you go. Although I did write in certain things inspired by real Chinese traditions, such as the ji (hairpin) ceremony which marked the transition to womanhood.

Any authors you particularly admire?
→ Terry Pratchett had a massive influence on me when I was younger. But I'd also have to thank Travis Baldree, whose delightful *Legends & Lattes* opened my eyes to the idea that I could write a cosy, low-stakes fantasy that people might actually read.

Any advice for *SFX* readers who are budding authors?
→ Read as much as you possibly can. Read widely; read voraciously; read diversely. *The Teller Of Small Fortunes* was the first book I've ever written, but it felt like I'd been practising all my life for it simply by reading.

The Teller Of Small Fortunes is out on 5 November, published by Hodderscape.

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SPOILER ALERT!

BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER FOR FOUND-FAMILY AFFAIR **TERRIFIER 3**

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**

David Howard Thornton as Art the Clown, and friend.

MIDNIGHT ON STATEN Island, New York. *SFX* has missed the last ferry back to Manhattan and an eerie mist rolls over the streets outside. Inside, however, it's laughter that fills the air.

Filming has just wrapped after a long day – one of 45 – for *Terrifier 3* and the crew are in high spirits. Damien Leone, creator, writer, director and producer of the supernatural slasher movies, is showing us a rough early edit of a scene – which is all kinds of meta given that we're also standing on location for the same production, which will finish filming in just a few days. It's also absolutely bloody brilliant – much like the day we've had...

SEND IN THE CLOWN

When *SFX* arrives at Amendment 18 – a Prohibition-themed catering company – on the morning of 11 April, 2024, the first thing to greet us in the unassuming event space is a dead body and a half-melted head. The room is filled with crates, equipment and Christmas decorations. There are boxes neatly stacked with fake wounds and gashes. Someone in a shirt emblazoned with "The Blood Guy" is carrying – you guessed it – buckets of fake blood. As we step around the dummy corpse, we're told he's called George, and that he's worth basically the cost of the original movie...

The definition of "sleeper hit", *Terrifier* has actually been around for over a decade. But now Art the Clown has crossed over – not just in ghostly terms, but into being a mainstream horror icon.

Leone says he realised he was onto something with the character when he made his second short film starring Art, also called *Terrifier*, in 2011. It later featured, alongside Art's debut appearance in *The 9th Circle* (2008), in anthology film *All Hallows' Eve* in 2013.

"That's all everybody ever talked about," Leone recalls. "Once they saw that they were like, 'What is the deal with that clown? He's so creepy. You need to keep making more things with him.' I got that note unanimously just across the board. So I said alright, get enough of the same feedback, I'm gonna follow it. So then I said, I'll make a short film based solely on him. That's when I turned him into a slasher and I really started developing his sick sense of humour, the dark sense of humour that really works for him."

Dark is putting it mildly: the franchise is known for its gory and inventive kill scenes. Dare we ask where the idea came from?

"There wasn't a light bulb moment where he just came to me full on, as is," Leone reflects. "It was a little more gradual. But it's really just a steady diet of horror films since I was three years old. Literally. My mother named me after *The Omen*. True story. She was obsessed with horror movies. She loved that name. So I knew since I was very young, like two years old, that I was named after this horror movie, I was named after the Antichrist.

STOCK ELEMENTS: NATALIA KOLOSOVA, NEUEVECTOR/GETTY

So here it is, merry Christmas... in April.

"Um, hello? Has anyone got a tissue or two?"

Welcome to Steubert's Bar. It's bloody good.

"Heeeere's Arty!" Someone's in trouble.

"I would watch horror movies with my mother – she was very liberal in that regard, she would let me watch pretty intense movies. I really fell in love with slashers, boogeymen. I became so familiar and so obsessed with that genre in particular, where those were my heroes.

"So just consuming that my entire life almost inadvertently spit out Art the Clown, like I had to give something back. He's essentially a love letter to all of those characters."

We later get to see Leone once more penning that love letter as he puts the finishing touches to actor David Howard Thornton's transformation into Art – a make-up process that's gone down from nearly three hours to just under two over the three movies. Thornton lets slip an excited noise as he's released from the chair. Now fully made-up and in costume, Art the Clown is in the building. What would be intimidating is diffused by him singing "I Feel Pretty" and someone rushing in with hot glue to stick his giant boot attachments on.

VIOLENT NIGHT

We head downstairs where what's usually a dining space has been transformed into a dive bar at Christmas. In front of a small stage area – which has a large snowman statue sitting on it – is a pool table, covered with Art's trademark black bin bag and some suspiciously unfriendly looking utensils.

Leone warns his leading man the table is extremely unstable as he talks Thornton through the various weapons, all the while surrounded by tinsel and fairy lights. The signs and chalkboards offering up various specials and forthcoming attractions are actually covering up TV screens.

Today's location is an event space that "usually has neon signs that say Live, Laugh, Love and The World Is Ours", production designer Olga Turka tells us. You genuinely wouldn't think it was ever anything *but* a dive bar.

> **"My mother named me after The Omen. She was obsessed with horror movies"**

Having originally joined the team on the second movie as a costume designer, Turka immediately stepped up to do production design as well.

"It's been really challenging," she says of this latest chapter, "because the scale is so much bigger, the rooms are bigger, the locations are bigger. Damien always writes huge, grandiose, he has an amazing imagination. We do have a much bigger crew, things are running more efficiently. But there are still a lot of tight deadlines to accomplish what he has in his brain!

"On the last one, we would prep for a week and film for a week. This one, we have set-up and breakdown in 24 hours, and then to the next location. So it's been quite the journey."

She counts this film as having around 40 locations. She notes that while previously they built sets upstate in a barn, "now we're doing entire houses.

"Damien and I have been in pre-production since August, talking about every little thing and all the symbolisms and stuff that are related to the storytelling. Everything has a purpose, it's not there by accident," she teases. "There are reasons we're putting these things in the background." Even the name of the fictional bar, Steubert's, is a production in-joke, she reveals.

"Most of our budget went to those Christmas lights!" she laughs. "Damien is very specific about the types of lights that he likes. He does not like LED, he only wants vintage aesthetics. So we made sure to always incorporate those types of bulbs, which are more expensive, and they're also more delicate, they're glass, and they get hot. So these are all things that we have to be cautious of when we're building the sets."

After two Halloween outings, why Christmas? "I love Christmas horror movies, especially anything with a maniac Santa Claus," Leone grins. "When I was a kid, I loved [anthology film] *Tales From The Crypt* (1972). Robert Zemeckis remade it years later for the HBO *Tales From The Crypt* series, it's called 'And All Through The House'. That's always been one of my favourite short films *ever*.

"But a maniac Santa Claus, just like the killer clown, is so overdone. But if you could do something fresh with this... oh my god, I can marry these two and get all these classic →

FINAL GIRL?

Lauren LaVera is Sienna Shaw

Where do we find Sienna in *Terrifier 3*?
We find her five years later. She has been in and out of mental health facilities and just really struggling. Damien and I have played with this idea that a lot of people think she has made a lot of this up. So she's struggling with her own mental health. She's struggling with the perception of what her loved ones and people who are just strangers, how they perceive her. So she's not doing great. She's a bit unhinged at this point, and that was really fun to play. She's with her family. She's moving back in and and she's getting a whiff of what's to come.

How is Sienna going to combat an evolved Art the Clown?
You see her put the pieces together in this of where Art comes from, and what he's about. She has a better understanding of who he is this time, which is interesting to see. But with this understanding, she feels that she might have an upper hand, because she believes she knows how she can potentially defeat him and whatever entities surround him.

She is going in with more finesse this time, because she was kind of stumbling in *Terrifier 2*. Now she has more of a plan – not a great plan, not the best plan in the world, but she knows what she's up against, and that's enough for her to instil determination in herself and try to warn the people around her as much as possible, whether they believe her or not.

What's your most memorable moment from filming?
It was a special effects gag, and I still laugh about it. I won't say who, but a character uses intestines to try to choke me, and Damien wanted me to bite through it. Of course I did, and I remember the special effects team were like, "What are we gonna use to make it look like faeces? What do you think of Nutella?"

I was like, "Do *not* ruin Nutella for me, I love Nutella. Use something else." So instead they decided to use crushed cherries which, of course, I don't think I'll ever be able to eat or at least look at them the same. It was terrible. It was crushed up cherries and dish soap [washing-up liquid]. I don't know why they used dish soap, but I was coughing up dish soap for days after that.

So I bite into it and the gag is supposed to shoot out like a rainbow, and instead it went right up my nose, and that's the take they used. I'm just choking and gagging after the take and then Damien, because he's so sadistic, he comes over to me, and he's like, "Wait, wait, suffer a little bit longer," and takes a picture of me!

I will definitely be posting that picture online, because you just see me with this miserable smile on my face, covered in blood. It wasn't one of my favourite moments. At that time, I hated Damien, but now I can look back on it and really laugh, and it's one of my favourite moments from this set. We were always just cracking jokes.

Director Damien Leone on set with Thornton.

This is not something you see every day.

Christmas movie tropes and put Art the Clown in those situations and just have a field day. It's been so fun because some of those situations in this film are absolutely hilarious. And then other ones are absolutely horrifying. Usually both," he laughs loudly.

LIFE IMITATES ART

For spoiler reasons we'll have to bring you a full breakdown – and we do mean *break* – of the kill scene at a later date. But suffice to say that veteran genre actor Daniel Roebuck is being tied up and regaling the crew with stories about working with Rob Zombie. Mid-conversation a noisy wind machine is tested. When it's turned off moments later, Roebuck loudly finishes with "...which is when I killed

Art prepares for another of his big moments.

Ho ho... oh. You won't want to sit on *his* knee.

the guy." It feels like an army of people working to make one scene happen – you can see the passion that goes into it, that it matters to everyone here.

The *Terrifier* family is strong. Producer and assistant director Michael Leavy has been around since the first film – in which he also played Will the exterminator. This movie, he says, is "next level of filmmaking" that is "bigger, bolder, crazier. None of us have ever done a movie to this scale, with this kind of budget."

He explains how they've made it more moody, more scary, shot with old-school lighting like *Halloween* or *Nightmare On Elm Street*, with pockets of light.

"There's two kills, in particular in this scene, that are definitely one of the biggest that we've ever done just in terms of effects, in terms of set pieces and how we need to shoot them."

It's during set-up for these effects – we promise it'll be worth the wait – that we turn to see Art sat under a dart board, his bloody hands in his lap. He yawns. His mouth is jet black.

"Damien wanted to make sure that we explain a little bit more of Sienna's past," Leavy says of what to expect, "why there's a link between her and Art the Clown, and explain a little bit more in detail about that to bring some clarity and fill our audience in on this journey. Something I like about the script, what Damien did was he teases just enough, he adds just enough, but to still make you wonder and puzzled. You're getting more clarity along the way with certain things, and then also raising more questions about other things."

Art actor Thornton's one of us – a proper geek. A huge Batman fan, he becomes even more animated – if such a thing is possible – when talking about the Dark Knight. With Joker his favourite villain of all time, his ambition is to play a "true depiction of the Joker from the comic book".

He's lapping up every morsel James Gunn drops about his forthcoming DCU. Gunn, he posits, is like us – he's a fan. Fans making things, Thornton says, means you get a better product. It's something that everyone we speak to on set mentions throughout the day – the care and the love that goes into film-making.

BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS

"He's meticulous," long-standing producer Phil Falcone says of his partnership with Leone. "Me, he'll tell you, I have three phrases: 'fuck 'em', 'we got to move' and 'close is good'. When we're building I go 'close is good, don't worry about it', he goes 'No, no, because people are gonna see it.'

"He's very meticulous. I'm still of a mind close is good. But he's still of a mind, perfection. So it's a good blend."

> **"Damien wanted to make sure that we explain a little bit more of Sienna's past"**

It was seeing a glut of Art T-shirts at a horror convention that made Falcone tell Leone they needed to go bigger on *Terrifier 2*. "We built the sets in my barn upstate," he laughs.

The previous film "spanned about two and a half years from beginning to end", he recalls. By comparison he says the journey from pre-production to finish on *Terrifier 3*, "you're talking about 10 months."

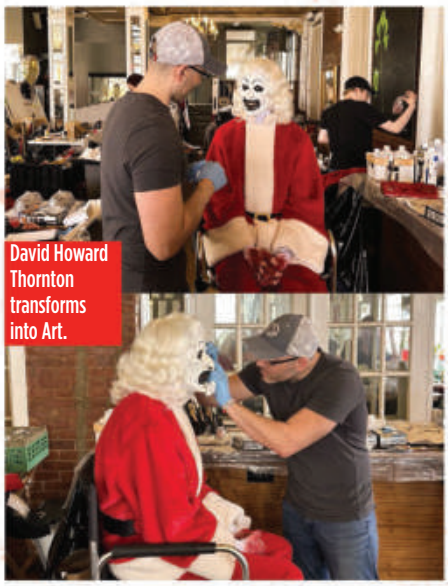
He explains that previously they never had deadlines. When they say it was a smaller operation, he means it – there were six crew members on the original. "Me and Damien did all the special effects. Now we have a much larger budget, but much shorter deadlines.

"So we hired an effects crew, much to my dismay, because that's the part that I love most about it, doing effects make-up, it took that out of my hands." He confesses he still helps out whenever he can.

Leone also says he's "still a little hands-on with the special effects. I can't keep my hands off the brush. I'm still putting blood on prosthetics".

This has allowed them to work with Emmy- and Oscar-winning industry legend Christien Tinsley. "The things that come out of his shop in this movie... they're mind-blowing. They're just some of the most realistic things I've ever seen, and they're gonna be really upsetting to some people," he laughs hard.

Falcone estimates the *Terrifier* team is nearer 40 people this time, but what they're getting warrants it. "The footage looks amazing. I'm excited and I don't get excited too much. This →



David Howard Thornton transforms into Art.

is the real deal. I've seen at least three scenes that could be the takeaway at any given moment. This is the biggest thing I've ever done."

ART IN SPACE

There's been much talk about a scene where even Thornton got nauseous during filming. Leone wants to keep that under wraps, but says that specific kill scene "might be the sleeper kill of the movie".

"This might be the one that everybody talks about. It involves a... let's say a bodily fluid that isn't blood. Let's just put it that way," he laughs.

But what can he say about where this film takes his lethal creation? One thing's for certain: he's returning for the Shaw siblings, Sienna and Jonathan...

"He's targeting them again, for a very specific reason," he teases. "You're gonna learn a lot more about the lore, everything going on with the supernatural that brought him back and what their roles are and how it all ties in. I grew up loving mythology, so this has a really mythic good versus evil theme going on through it."

That witching hour we spoke of is approaching; there's a hard out for production

> **"I have the whole story mapped out. I had it mapped out since part two"**

at midnight and the bar is literally being stripped while filming is focused on close-ups on the stage. Thornton's already had his make-up removed, the second skin meticulously saved for an as-yet unspecified horror collector. His face may live to see another day, but what does the future hold for horror's newest icon?

Leone says that following the success of *Terrifier 2*, he had meetings with studios and producers. "Some really big, heavy hitters," he elaborates.

"They were all interested, but I was getting the feeling that I was going to have to water it down in some regard, possibly reboot it in terms of starting from scratch and trying to appeal to a broader audience. There were just things that I wasn't really comfortable with.

"The whole reason why this was successful is because it's just been very true to me. I've been able to just be autonomous with it. Really, it's my true vision, for better or worse, but I really do believe that's one of the reasons why it's successful, that there's no interference. Hopefully it's just the singular vision of the artist that's really coming through.

"My big fear is of going on too long and wearing out my welcome," he considers.

Insert your own "biggest fan" joke here.

"Because that does happen to all of my favourites. Almost always it happens to the slasher franchises where they make 10 of them. I want to have a solid franchise, whether it be a trilogy – or maybe a quadrilogy if I have one more in mind – where it starts, where it ends, and you can walk away with a satisfying conclusion and closure and say that was pretty cool. I know what that is. So that would be the goal."

Falcone agrees. "Truthfully, I just hope it keeps going on the trajectory that it is. Everything slows down at some point in time. I'm hoping that there's a lot more to go. You'd never want to see it become 'Art the Clown goes into space'. You'd watch it and you'd go, 'God, they're falling fast!'

"For *Terrifier 4*, what I would like is a lot more time to do what we need to do, not be on such a tight deadline. But other than that, I think we'll always improve, as technology gets better, more toys to play with, but I hope we'll always stay with no CG, or as little as possible."

Leone suggests that a fourth instalment of *Terrifier* could be the last, however.

"I think so," he says. "I have the whole story mapped out. I had it mapped out since part two, honestly, which is huge. Knowing where you're going to end it is probably the hardest thing and I figured out the ending to this a while ago. The safety net is that Art the Clown

He really pulls off that jaunty hat.

Damien Leone checks out a shot.

Has Art got a friend... or an enemy?

He's been! Wonder what goodies he left us?

It's all in the detail. The disgusting detail.

is supernatural. So I always have that in my back pocket. If I ever come up with something else, or I want to bring him back out, there's always a loophole. There's always a way to do it, but I do have a solid conclusion in mind, that I think would be very satisfying.

"But right now I'm speaking as a naive artist where artistic integrity is my focal point, but you never know where that's gonna go. I love this character so much, I might really just miss him and want to bring him back out and ideas are constantly popping up."

Until then, there's a whole movie of mayhem to unpack, and a plethora of kills.

"There's a lot of great set-pieces. The one we're filming currently is one of my favourites. It's probably the funniest scene in any of my movies. So that's going to be exciting.

"But the finale of this movie, that took us about two weeks to shoot, I think is going to be the most exciting and rewarding. I can't really go into it because of spoilers, but I mean I'm all about, you never want to lose your audience in the finale, right?

"You want to have a big, rousing climax and I think we did that. I'm excited for people to see the end of the movie..."

Terrifier 3 is in cinemas from 11 October. Read more Terrifier interviews at gamesradar.com/sfx.

DEATH BECOMES HIM

Daniel Roebuck is Santa (sort of)

How was your day of being tortured by Art the Clown?
It's an interesting thing to be an actor. When you're a movie star, you live through everything. When you're a character actor, you don't. So I've died in so many ways. This, I would say, is the most unique way that I've died. I did explode on *Lost*. I was drowned in a vat of wine on *Monk*. I fell to my death in a few things. I was once killed by a flying skeleton head in Larry Blamire's *The Lost Skeleton Returns Again*...

So there's been a lot of death in my career. But I'm an actor because of actors like Vincent Price and Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi and Lon Chaney and Lon Chaney Jr. It's not a surprise I've ended up in horror movies. And more than that, it's even stranger when I realised they lived the same life. They died in everything. Karloff died constantly!

What can you say about Santa and why Art has beef with him?
Art's just anti-human, it seems. We took great pains to make this guy seem like he was just a nice guy. It's a couple of good old guys having a beer a couple of days before the holidays, and things just don't turn out the way they thought they would when they got up that morning. Art's interactions with us don't go very well... Who could complain? So now I've been killed by Michael Myers. I've been killed by the *Phantasm* sphere. I've been killed now by Art the Clown. I was Grandpa Munster [in Rob Zombie's 2022 film]. I mean, I don't know what else to do. You know?

And you're a big *Munsters* fan...
The Munsters was so great. In doing *The Munsters* I got to be Count Dracula in a Universal movie. Now, that's not a little thing. That's a big thing. Including Nicolas Cage, how many Count Draculas have been in Universal movies? I might be one of 20. One of 15. That's me and Lugosi and John Carradine and me! And the guy that played the Spanish version. So who would have thought that the character actor would end up in the cape? But God is good. It's how I feel. It's what I was always meant to do. I'm sure that's why I was drawn to this stuff in the first place.

I was told by Mr [Rob] Zombie specifically that I'm never allowed to complain about a little part in one of his movies again, now that he's made me Dracula.

Did you get to keep Grandpa's cape?
[Scoffs] Oh yes. We tried to negotiate for it and they were like "No!" so I went with Plan B: steal it. I didn't really steal it, because the fact is, if they had needed reshoots, it was easier if I knew where everything was than sending someone into... [Laughs] I've totally justified it!

My wife is standing nearby... Tammy, what do I want you to do with the tuxedo and cape when I die? [Tammy: You'll be wearing it in the casket.]

That's my plan. Just like Lugosi, baby. I'm doing it! I'm taking it all with me! If somebody wants it, they're going to have to really be committed to getting it!

Damien Leone directing on set in Steubert's.

CLOWNING AROUND

DAVID HOWARD THORNTON IS ART THE CLOWN

Where does *Terrifier 3* take you and Art?
I've just felt a lot more comfortable with the character this time around, which I think also goes with the character this time because he's so much more confident. He's come back from the dead twice now, and now he's got basically demonic powers. He's fully supernatural this time around, so he knows he's hard to kill. So both of us are more confident with what we're doing and because of that, I've had a lot more fun.

I know where he lives in my head now. The first film, especially, I was discovering so many things myself, having to learn how to do a lot of things on the job, because I had never done a lot of fight choreography or anything like that. So this time around, I'm like, oh, I know how to do this now, this is fun.

What was your stand-out moment filming *Terrifier 3*?
I say the scene we filmed this week [with Daniel Roebuck]. This is a scene that I've been looking forward to filming ever since I read the script. I was like, "Oh, it's very much like the pizzeria scene or the costume shop scene." I love the scenes of Art just messing around with people in public and toying with them before he kills them.

Also, a scene where I'm able to dive into my bread and butter, which is physical comedy, and really have fun with that and play. For this one, I got to do the scene with three fantastic character actors whose careers I've been idolising my entire life. I never imagined I would be sharing screen time with them, let alone breathing the same air as these gentlemen. It was pure joy for me to just play around with these guys all week. Because that's what we did. We just played and they just filmed us playing around. This is why I do this, this is what feeds me. I love it.

Is it harder for you to not have a speaking role?
Not really. I've always wanted to play a silent character like that, because I've always loved physical comedy. That was always my thing, my go-to, in theatre. I always wanted that challenge. Plus I love that I don't have to memorise lines for once. I'm used to having to memorise 90-plus pages of dialogue and this is *wonderful*.

What would you like to see happen with Art in future?
I know we at least want to do one more movie after this. But I hope it keeps going. I hope we keep finding new creative ways to tell stories about these characters. I think he's a fun character.

There's so much more stuff I want to keep doing with him, and I trust Damien to come up with fun stories to tell. I'd like to have the longevity with creative storytelling that the *Chucky* series has had. I think that's a great example of how to keep a franchise going and keep finding new things to do.

I'd like to have that kind of trajectory with the character. It hasn't gotten stale and that's hard to do. I feel Chucky has especially navigated that territory fantastically.

> "There's so much more stuff I want to keep doing with him"

See? Art's not so scary after all. (Yeah, right.)

What's your experience of fandom been like?
I've signed a lot of tattoos, which has been interesting to do. But fandom-wise, it's been surreal for me to find out other celebrities that I've admired for years have been fans. I've been to some conventions where they've been nervous to come up and talk to me. I'm like, are you kidding me?

Because I still feel like I'm just David Thornton from Alabama, the shy geek that no one paid attention to in high school. So to know that people that I have admired for a while, especially people that I have modelled my own career off...

Oh my god, I hate to name-drop, but he's been a big, huge, idol of mine and it's where I've always wanted my career to go. I've modelled my career path off of him: Doug Jones. He's such a talented man. I finally got to meet him at conventions and we just hit it off. It amazes me that he's seen my work!

He's become a friend and a mentor in some ways, and that's something I never expected. It's like, you are why I am where I am, I have admired you for so long. To be recognised by someone that I have admired in that way, it's amazing. It's absolutely amazing.

What's the strangest place you've seen a tattoo of yourself?
Oh, I'm in some interesting places... some nether region areas where people just show up and they're like, "Hey, I got you right here, above my miaow miaow!"

What do you want for Christmas? Why, to live...

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

FROM SHOWRUNNERS JOHN GRIFFIN AND JEFF PINKNER EXPLAIN WHY THEY BREAK THE RULES OF THEIR OWN SHOW IN SEASON THREE

WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**

FOR TWO SEASONS THE CORE conceit of horror series *From* has been that of a rural American town that won't let anybody leave. All of its residents – from de facto sheriff Boyd Stevens (Harold Perrineau) to sweet young Ethan Matthews (Simon Webster) – stumbled into the town's limits, and no one has found a way to escape. To make matters worse, when night falls shape-shifting monsters emerge from the woods and kill anyone outside for their sport.

Until this season's premiere, *From*'s claustrophobic parameters have been integral to its premise. Yet for season three, creator John Griffin and executive producer Jeff Pinkner have shattered their rules by allowing Tabitha Matthews (Catalina Sandino Moreno) to return to the outside world, waking from a dream to find herself in a Camden, Maine hospital. Left behind are her family and the rest of the townsfolk, who are panicking over food shortages and a sudden, dangerous change in the weather.

"Season three, we refer to it as the fulcrum season," Griffin tells *SFX*, concerning this massive change. "Tabitha is opening up a whole new corner of her experience, and of the mystery of this place. A lot of off-season discussion went into, how are we going to handle Camden? For the first time, we are making a departure from the setting that the audience has lived in, which is exciting. But at the same time, it's finding that balance of exactly how much time and how much story real estate each episode we're going to dedicate there. It was a process."

Unlike other genre showrunners, who may promise their serialised shows are entirely plotted out, Griffin admits the contrary is true. "Even though we know exactly where we're going, the show is always surprising us with where it takes us," he explains.

For example, Pinkner says of this season, "We knew that we were going to throw a lot of rocks at Boyd and the residents of the town. We had a vague sense of the journey that Tabitha was going to take, having been kicked out of the lighthouse. But knowing where we want to end up, it gives us the confidence to be able to play." What is in store for Tabitha now that she has seemingly returned to normal life? "The emotional journey that Tabitha goes on, starting with waking up in Camden, is going to impact her story for the whole season," Pinkner teases. "We knew before she ended up in Camden that she was going to acquire different things, some of it mythologically related, some of it internal, and some of it is external."

> **"Something in this town is aware that Boyd is the linchpin holding things together"**

Like being drawn to meet the father of Victor (Scott McCord), the mystery town's longest resident and biggest enigma. "Victor's father [Robert Joy] was a discovery for us that got us really excited," Pinker says. "Tabitha's interactions with him, and obviously her connection to Victor, have been building for a couple of years. And Ethan's connection to Victor gave us an opportunity to explore the people left behind."

As for what's going on back in town, Boyd's frightening forest encounters in season two

Boyd Stevens (Harold Perrineau): lost.

David Alpay plays the sarky tech genius Jade.

Julie (Hannah Cheramy) is never going to the prom.

seemed to galvanise his will against the monsters at the door. But Griffin says that the entities are not done with him yet.

"I think one thing has become clear over the first two seasons and especially in the first two episodes of season three: something in this town is aware that Boyd is the linchpin that is holding things together," Griffin says. "So finding different ways to test him, to push him, to try and break him, has seemingly become one of the goals of this place."

Even Boyd's best efforts can fall short sometimes, as evidenced by (spoilers!) a horrific death he witnessed at the end of the season three premiere.

"Thank God for Harold," Pinkner says of their lead actor, "because his performance is so vulnerable, is so transparent, is so authentic, all of those emotions are in his eyes and on his face so he brings the depth and the gravitas that we imagine."

While *From* is a critical and audience favourite, it's still a sleeper, which raises the question: what's the ultimate plan for the series' duration? Griffin promises there's always been a "magic number" to tell the story as intended, but renewal is still not assured.

"In some ways, we like to make it as hard as possible at the end of each season for us to get cancelled," Griffin laughs, referring to their cliffhangers. "We never feel pressured to wrap it up this season because there might not be a next. There is a certain amount of time this story needs. We would like to think we're prepared for that."

From is on MGM+ and NOW.

Is Jade having another of his visions? Maybe...

Corteon Moore as Boyd's son Ellis has been through a lot.

WHY DON'T YOU STAY FOR A BITE?

THE VAMPIRE COMES HOME AS DIRECTOR EUROS LYN WELCOMES *SFX* TO HIS NEW DARK COMEDY THE RADLEYS

WORDS: **CLARISSE LOUGHREY**

Peter (Damian Lewis) and Helen (Kelly Macdonald)...

...discover something nasty in the woods.

"FRESH MEAT! FRESH MEAT!" director Euros Lyn shouts, mischief in his voice. He's on the set of his new film, Sky's dark vampire comedy *The Radleys*, and there's a herd of partygoer extras, potential snacks for a hungry coffin-dweller, whose attention he requires.

It's early afternoon, in the peak of summer, during one of 2023's waves of blinding sunshine, and *SFX* is spending it in the dark. We're hovering on the sidelines of Watford's PRYZM nightclub, in a room lined with embossed studs and giant mirrors. Any and every surface is in danger of being sticky to the touch. Suddenly, an extra in a dog costume walks past. They blend into the crowd. Mesh T-shirts. Slicked, gelled-back hair. Dry ice. Blood-red spotlights.

Yet it's easy to spot him, with his tattoos, luridly patterned, open shirt and shoulder-length, shaggy locks. He looms over everyone else. It's Damien Lewis, as you've never seen the *Homeland* and *Wolf Hall* star before, playing rock 'n' roll vamp Will Radley. In costume, he looks like the kind of guy who'd try to sell you a used gold tooth.

Will's the devil that perches on the shoulder of his teenage nephew, Rowan (Harry Baxendale). He's an out-and-proud vampire, who feasts whenever and on whomever he likes. Rowan's father, Peter, meanwhile, is what they call an "abstainer", a vampire who goes without blood and lives a regulated existence.

He's raised his family, who have inherited his condition, with the aid of *The Abstainer's Handbook* – frequently quoted in Matt Haig's bestselling source novel. "Be proud to act like a normal human being," one extract goes. "Keep daylight hours, get a regular job, and mix in the company of people with a fixed sense of right and wrong."

Peter is also played by Lewis. He and Will are twins, a vampiric Romulus and Remus.

Rowan (Harry Baxendale, left).

Will's having a bit of a moment.

Peter's the one in the iron-pressed shirt and ivory chinos, a mild-mannered and somewhat sexless physician. "We've got a protagonist whose raison d'être is to save people's lives," Lyn later tells *SFX*. "And, at the same time, he has this dark desire, to consume their blood, destroy them, and kill them for his own pleasure.

"It's such a basic conflict within his character," adds the director, who's shot episodes of *Doctor Who*, *Daredevil*, *His Dark Materials* and the televised version of *Let The Right One In*. "And Damien Lewis plays it so brilliantly. To me, it's a dilemma we as humans face every day. We have such strong desires, but our desires can destroy our relationships, they can destroy our planet – it feels like a universal theme. Exploring that in a vampire context was really interesting."

Rowan and his sister Clara (Bo Bragason) have been raised in total ignorance of their true natures. But they know they're different.

> **"We have such strong desires, but our desires can destroy our relationships"**

He barely sleeps at night and feels oddly drawn to the romantic, mysterious past. Her conversion to veganism has made her desperately sick.

A sudden, violent incident forces the truth out into the light, as Peter and his wife Helen (Kelly Macdonald) reach out to Will for his blood-sourced skills and expertise (in Haig's YA book, drinking blood grants powers like flight and hypnosis). Big mistake. Rowan soon falls under his libertine influence. "Damien as a person is so kind and sweet and generous, and a really lovely man," Lyn says. "There also is a bit of a devil in him. He brings those qualities to these two →

Damien Lewis as Will Radley: rock and roll! And legs!

SEEING DOUBLE

DAMIEN LEWIS ON TRANSFORMING INTO TWIN VAMPIRES PETER AND WILL RADLEY

What kind of vampiric homework did you do in preparation?
I read *Dracula* and obviously *The Radleys*, the book, which I really enjoyed. I wasn't a big vampire fan, prior to making the film. So I learned a lot of the codes. Asking people across the threshold – obviously, everyone knows about the garlic and don't look in the mirror and the stakes through the heart etc, etc. But asking a vampire into your house being part of vampire code was a new one to me.

How did you collectively decide on Will's look?
Joanna [Eatwell, the film's costume designer], and I had conversations very early on about him. I didn't want him to be effete. I didn't want him to be fey, in any way. He teaches undergraduate English. I didn't want him to be silk-scarfed and long-coated in a sort of Edwardian way. Then we just started hitting on this idea of Marc Bolan, Keith Richards – that he should have a sort of glam rock vibe to him. We always wanted that long hair.

Joanna had spent time growing up in LA, as a kid. She remembers the pimps and the hustlers walking down Sunset with their low-slung vest and leopard print, open shirt. So she started leaning into that a little bit. I wore a ring that Keith Richards had worn in a Stones music video years ago.

Does the duality of Peter and Will, to you, reflect a kind of Jekyll and Hyde dynamic?
One is the superego, the other is the id, basically. Peter's efforts to control his id with his superego – the rational, reasonable self – is just making him, his wife and his children incredibly unhappy. So there's a mixed message in the film, which I think is what makes it so deliciously complex. He's not leading his best life, but he's trying to be a good person. And Will is living his best life, but is innately bad, and is an addict.

It will be an interesting moment to see how people respond to that metaphor of addiction. If they are all addicts, and they are all helpless, and victims of their addiction, then is Will forgivable for what he does? Is he helpless to alter his behaviour? Because Peter being the other side of the self, being the side of the self that has attempted to kick an addiction that he believes to be morally questionable – it's what leads us to believe that Will makes a choice to be that person, and to revel in it.

But the mixed message is that Will revelling in his innate badness is happy, he's free. Peter, by contrast, is unhappy and unfree, is constrained by the set of rules that he and society have imposed on him. That's why I think they represent those two sides in all of us: the side that wants to break the rules, let it all hang out and ignore the rules for a weekend, but most of us actually spend our time adhering to the social codes and norms.

Director Euros Lyn checks a scene with Lewis.

Did you use any shortcuts to switch between the characters?
Yes, absolutely. I still revert to parts of my training when I was at drama school. I study animals. So that's for physicality. It was important that Will was a predator, he was a big cat, like a cheetah or a leopard. So everything is a circular motion and a sort of a roll. With Peter, he was a bird, something quite uptight, held tight, maybe a stork. Something still, a bit brittle, a bit stiff. I use animals a lot when I'm studying a role and preparing a role.

What was it like working with your co-stars, Kelly Macdonald and Harry Baxendale?
Kelly's an entirely instinctive actress and she's very funny. She's got a funny bone. At the same time, she's smart, and she understands pathos. Harry's wonderful. He worked really hard. He was unbelievably focused. He has a lovely earnest innocence, which is perfect for the role of Rowan. There's an intelligence and a disbelief at what's unravelling before him – that's what we had to find in a young actor, someone who could just experience the enormity of what's going on in front of him, and take us with him. And he does that beautifully.

Jay Lycurgo as Evan Copeleigh (right).

Definitely nothing sinister going on here.

“What makes you good and what makes you bad? Is it nature or nurture?”

roles really brilliantly.” And so *SFX* find ourselves here, at the club, in the ruins of that decision. Lewis and Baxendale, as Will and Rowan, crowd around a card table. Will looks imperious. A cruel smirk spreads across his lips. We can’t quite hear what he’s saying but, moments later, Rowan stumbles back out of the scene with his arms full of poker chips.

“It’s a club that Will takes Rowan to, to show him how to live,” explains producer Debbie Gray. “He goes out to clubs and it’s totally eclectic. It’s where everyone can be themselves. There are no boundaries.”

“I wrote *The Radleys* way back initially as a screenplay about 15 years ago,” Haig tells *SFX*. “I wanted to do something that also could exist within the same kinds of world as the vampire films I loved as a teenager, like *Near Dark* and *The Lost Boys*, and with even a hint of *Salem’s Lot*. I wanted it to be fun, but also feel real. Or as real as a vampire story can feel.

“So it is also about addiction, sexuality, growing up, and the feeling of putting on a kind of role as an adult rather than being true to yourself.”

“I haven’t seen a vampire story like this,” Baxendale says, between takes. “It’s an incredibly human story, even though it’s about figures that don’t exist as far as we know.”

Addiction and desire became a central part of the vampire’s reputation in the 19th century, once they were humanised and romanticised by *Carmilla* and *Dracula*. Intertwined, too, is an association with queer or otherwise marginalised identities. Here, Talitha Stevenson’s screenplay makes one major change to Haig’s book in order to find a new way to honour that legacy, changing the object of Rowan’s affections from Eve to Evan (Jay Lycurgo).

“Rowan’s sexuality is uncomplicated to him,” says Lyn. “He falls in love head over heels with the boy next door, but what’s really hard for him to deal with is the understanding that he’s a vampire. This is a coming-out story but, in our film, they’re not coming out as gay, they’re coming out as vampires. So that really felt like a fun spin on something we’re very familiar with.”

While the book was briefly considered by director Alfonso Cuarón back in 2010, Lyn’s take on *The Radleys* brings the vampire back home from Hollywood, and its sparkling heartthrobs, to the place where its modern iteration was forged. The film was shot in Whitby, the North Yorkshire seaside town where Dracula first lands in England in Stoker’s novel.

It’s another change to Haig’s story, originally set not far away in the village of Bishopthorpe. “We scouted the real Bishopthorpe, which is on the fringes of York,” Lyn explains. “It had that sense of middle England, and that sense of suburbia, which was perfect for the film, but it lacked a

Lennie James with a worse-for-wear Evan.

Helen's just trying to be a good mum.

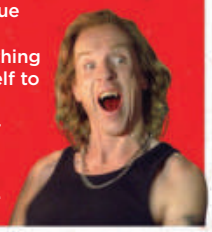
Rowan, Clara and Evan 'avin a laugh.

WHAT WE DO IN THE SHADOWS

Director Euros Lyn on establishing the rules of *The Radleys'* vampires

I've shot a lot of flying sequences in stuff that I've made. Flying is really hard to pull off even when you've got a $120 million Marvel budget, it still has an unreal quality to it. We decided to not literally see our heroes fly but, throughout the film, there's a quality of them being airborne. So we've got lots of drone shots. You get a sense of flight, even though we never see our characters leap into the air and fly.

The other thing as well was the choice to make [the fangs] retractable ones. Vampires live amongst everyday people, they go to school, they're your GP, they turn up at your book club. So the fangs might be a bit of a giveaway, if they were there all the time. We needed a way for them to be able to pass as human. That idea of passing and being able to carry multiple identities at the same time – that you don't always show your true colours and reveal everything about yourself to the people around you – is something I was interested in.



certain drama. I really wanted a sense that we're on the edge of the wilderness." Whitby, with its ruined abbey, perilous cliffs and roaring ocean – all featured in Stoker's book – fitted the bill perfectly.

"It really drew us there," he continues. "Visually, it's such an exciting place because it's got this tiny little medieval fishing village that's grown. It feels like a microcosm of Britain. But in our story, it's a fictional town, and we're borrowing all the extra connotations that come with that place to serve the tone."

"This is a very British, 'ordinary', middle-class family of vampires," Haig says. "A doctor and his frustrated artist wife. They listen to Radio 4 and have dinner parties. Their teens are socially conscious, angst-ridden kids trying to work out all the normal stuff."

Yet, a little of Hollywood may have rubbed off on *The Radleys*, with its sunny, sterile, quasi-American depiction of suburbia. According to Gray, Haig's book was pitched as "*American Beauty* meets *The Addams Family*" – the crucial difference being that, while the Addamses have nothing to hide, and live surrounded by gothic decay, the Radleys conceal their supernatural tendencies behind glass patio doors and mid-century furniture.

"We were looking for a house that an estate agent might describe as 'perfectly liveable and accommodating for a family'," Lyn explains. "But also we made a conscious choice to not lean into the gothic and to present a modern retelling of the story. Our production designer Sarah Jenneson really had a clear sense of where we wanted to set the dial stylistically. She was really committed to a sense of suburbia, of lawns and identikit houses – suburbia as a prison, really."

The Radleys is about the vampire, past and present, and all that it stirs within ourselves and others. "There's a question at the heart of our film," Lyn says. "What makes you good and what makes you bad? Is it nature or nurture? Will has a really attractive quality that I think, at times, we would all like to be able to go out to a party and get off with anybody, and just say 'Yes' to desire.

"But then, there are other times where that form of living is so self-destructive and soulless. With Peter, that repressing of your desires can come under an incredibly negative light, and yet he's the one who has the love of a wife and his two kids, a family in a home that is safe for him. It's about understanding them as two sides of the same coin."

The Radleys is on Sky Cinema and NOW from 18 October.

GIVING THEM HELL

Jack Kesy as Hellboy, with Adeline Rudolph.

IT'S NEW TERRITORY FOR HELLBOY IN THE CROOKED MAN WORDS: **ROBBIE DUNLOP**

HELLBOY'S FOURTH LIVE-action outing treads new albeit familiar territory, being derived from *The Crooked Man*, a three-part miniseries published by Dark Horse Comics in 1998.

"It's completely different to anything that's been done with the character before," director and co-scriptwriter Brian Taylor tells Red Alert, explaining that *Hellboy* creator Mike Mignola felt previous live-action movies hadn't been entirely true to his vision.

"It meant a lot to Mike that I was striving for authenticity, that I was striving to be as true as possible to his comics," he says. "I wanted to adapt it as closely and faithfully as possible in the way that you would a Stephen King or Clive Barker story. Just to put a lot of love and authenticity into it – make it feel like Mike's *Hellboy*.

"I certainly wasn't going to try and emulate what Guillermo [del Toro] did on a tiny fraction of the budget. That's a losing proposition right there in any reality!"

Following an adrenaline-fuelled battle with a giant snake on a speeding train, Hellboy finds himself stranded in the forests of rural Appalachia, where he encounters a small community haunted by witches and other supernatural beings, including the malevolent Crooked Man.

"It's a true piece of folk horror which I think is pretty representative of my favourite era of *Hellboy* comic books," Taylor says, likening the newest – and because of the '50s setting, youngest – iteration of the half-demon superhero to "a travelling night stalker – a little bit confused, trying to find his way in the world".

Taylor praises actor Jack Kesy (*The Strain*) for bringing "a lot of nuance and a lot of subtlety" to the iconic role. "He's not this sort of big theatrical actor, he's very

Could this be the crooked man himself? Find out...

Kids! Smoking is bad for you. As is being Hellboy.

Director Brian Taylor goes over the script.

naturalistic and internal. The concern is, is a guy like that going to get a lot of the good stuff that he does buried under all this rubber? So I talked with KM Effects, a really great UK-based effects company that designed the Hellboy stuff.

"What we wanted was for [the make-up] to be as transparent as possible, as light as possible, and really feel like an extension of his face, not a mask, so that he could really emote. I think we achieved that. You're able to get in there and see that emotion, subtlety and nuance in his performance. It doesn't seem like a guy hiding behind a mask. It seems like a person.

"It's incredible what's involved," Taylor adds. "The guy was in the chair for four hours every morning and an hour every evening just to get out of it all."

At every stage of the production, Taylor would refer back to the original *Crooked Man* comic art by Richard Corben, which he had up on the walls of his office. "Whenever anybody came in and had questions, I would be able to point to one and say, 'It wants to look like that, it wants to feel like that.'

"There's a guy online who took frames from the trailer and put them side by side with frames from the comic and you can see it's almost exact."

"It's completely different to anything that's been done with the character before"

In one such moment, events descend into pure body horror when a raccoon jumps into villager Cora Fisher's (Hannah Margetson) mouth, possessing her in a shockingly graphic fashion.

"Reading it on the page, you think this could either be a really bad CG sequence or we can get in there and do it the way Clive Barker would do it, with a lot of silicon and lube and a great performance by an actor. So that's what we did. We created it practically. There's no CG whatsoever; not even an enhancement.

"I've seen the scene millions of times, but now I can't even see where the hand-off is between the rubber and the flesh; where the effect becomes the real actor. The moment of that cut is even hard for me to find, I think it's completely seamless."

Adapting a three-part comic into a feature-length movie was always going to demand some embellishments. So Mignola created a sidekick for Hellboy in the form of rookie paranormal researcher Bobbie Jo Song (Adeline Rudolph), while Taylor wrote Hellboy and his mother into some hallucinatory scenes "loosely inspired" by another Mignola story, "The Chained Coffin". "We took little pieces from that, basically for them to go face to face and lay bare their feelings for each other," Taylor explains. "It was really fun to watch and really fun for the actors to do. For me it's a stand-out scene in the film."

From the beginning Taylor was aware of his responsibility to the huge *Hellboy* fanbase, but his personal mandate was "to make this movie for an audience of one" – Mignola himself. "I wanted the creator to be happy, to feel like he's seeing his version of *Hellboy* on screen for the first time, and really just try and do a faithful adaptation of one of the most beloved stories in comics. Certainly, for fans, it's a special piece of literature," Taylor smiles, adding, "I figure if Mike's happy, then the fans will be happy."

Hellboy: The Crooked Man is in cinemas now.

© DARK HORSE COMICS

Susan, Ben, Dr Cody, Mark, and Father Callahan.

THE MAINE EVENT

THE DARK IS RISING IN SALEM'S LOT AS STEPHEN KING'S DEATHLESS TALE RETURNS TO THE SCREEN

WORDS: **NICK SETCHFIELD**

YOU CAN STAKE IT, DECAPITATE IT OR SEAR A crucifix into its flesh, but like any self-respecting case of vampirism, *Salem's Lot* always comes back for more.

The book was the first manifestation. Stephen King's 1975 novel told of a town in rural Maine infested by the undead. "I wondered aloud what would happen if Dracula came back in the 20th century, to America," King recalled of a tale that cast tomb-cold European shadows over New England. A memorable TV version arrived in 1979, pitting *Starsky And Hutch* icon David Soul against the monstrous forces of Jerusalem's Lot, while 2004 brought a further small-screen adaptation, this time with Rob Lowe.

Now comes yet another resurrection, rising out of that cursed Maine soil. "I've been a Stephen King fan since I was in high school," says producer Michael Clear of Atomic Monster,

Not sure putting a sheet on it will help...

the prolific, horror-leaning production company founded by James Wan. "*Salem's Lot* was the second book I read, after *The Stand*, and I've always referred back to it while making horror movies. It's always been a part of my DNA as a horror movie producer.

"We had initially developed a pilot script [for television]. Then when the first *It* movie came out we realised that there was a very clear path to a feature film adaptation of the book and that's when we hired Gary to adapt it."

> **"The first draft of the script started to feel like it was going to be just as long as the book"**

Gary is Gary Dauberman, co-writer of *It* and *It Chapter Two* along with the *Annabelle* trilogy and *The Nun*. He made his debut behind the camera with 2019's *Annabelle Comes Home* and directs his own adaptation of King's story.

So. Third time around. In the name of all that's unholy, why tell this tale again? "We always approach movies from the perspective of fans," Clear tells *SFX*.

"We're all fans of the [1979] Tobe Hooper version. For us, bringing this story to a new audience was really the goal, and we knew that with Gary's knack for writing characters and creating a sense of place that we could really capture the vibe of the book, and the time period of the book, and do it in a fun, retro way that would feel transportive to an audience today. That was one of the things that was most exciting to us, taking a modern audience and placing them into the vibe of the original Stephen King book. That just excited all of us."

Mark (Jordan Preston Carter) and Mathew (Bill Camp).

It's a long book – and this is a two-hour feature, not a TV miniseries with the luxury of screentime to fill.

"It was more challenging than I anticipated," admits Dauberman of the adaptation process. "And I anticipated it being really challenging! My initial goal was to try and stick to the book as much as I could, but when the first draft started to feel like it was going to be just as long as the book, I knew some changes would have to be made. It forced me to cut a lot of the secondary characters so I could just focus on the core group of Ben, Mark, Susan, Dr Cody, Matt and Father Callahan."

"Gary has an incredible knack for finding specific moments to bring characters to life," adds Clear. "He does that with such efficiency that you feel like you know each character from the moment you meet them.

"With a book that has so much to it, that was one of our strengths, one of the reasons we were able to tell it in a more condensed way. Gary has an ability to tell a lot of story with little moments. →

Dr Cody (Alfre Woodard) has a bit of a problem.

Father Callahan (John Benjamin Hickey). Eep.

"In addition, he has a great sense of world-building, creating that sense of time and place. He does that so holistically that you can really melt into the reality of the movie. On top of that he loves horror movies and we do too. It was like kids in a playground, the whole time."

Top Gun: Maverick's Lewis Pullman is Ben Mears, a writer haunted by the past who returns to his hometown only to discover it's in the grip of an ancient vampire named Barlow and his human familiar, Straker, who's busy supplying succulent, blood-filled treats to his master.

"Lewis has this Frank Capra everyman quality to him that I absolutely adore," says Dauberman of his lead actor, "and I really wanted that in this version of Ben. Yes, he's a famous author but I didn't want him driving into town with a cool, cocky confidence. I thought it'd be more interesting for him to find that during the movie."

"With someone like Lewis you're onboard with him from the moment you meet him, because of who he is as a person," says Clear. "He has a very soulful, empathetic nature and whether you meet him in person or see him on screen, it's the same feeling. You want this person to win. You want this person to survive. You are rooting for them."

IT'S A LOT

This take on *Salem's Lot* is a period piece, preserving the mid-'70s setting of King's novel. "It was always part of the appeal," says Clear, "in part because the quiet lives of desperation in this small town felt very of that moment.

"So much of our movie is about a group of people who feel forgotten in that moment in time, and who realise that no one else is going to come and save them. They have to save themselves. For me that moment in time, in that area of our country, was a pretty compelling set-up for the story."

But this is no polyester-drenched fancy dress party. Scares not flares is the guiding principle.

"We make a lot of period horror movies," says Clear, "and what we've learned is that you want the audience to be focused on the characters and the scares and not get too distracted by the period trappings. If you can make them feel it rather than just see it then it actually allows them to slip better into the reality of the movie."

The filmmakers know that comparisons with Tobe Hooper's original are inevitable. The shot of an undead Danny Glick floating outside a bedroom window became a legendary, generation-scarring memory. Dauberman's version re-stages this moment. How do you make it feel new again and not just some kind of a cover version?

"The moment is so influential that a lot of people don't realise its influence, if that makes sense," the director tells *SFX*. "I was surprised by how many people thought we were ripping off something else with this scene because they've seen so many 'covers' of it, as you put it, not knowing they were seeing the 'cover'. That wasn't something I considered as I approached it.

"After revisiting the miniseries, it played shorter than I remembered, so I knew I really wanted to live in this scene as long as I could."

"For us one of the priorities was in casting those two boys," adds Clear. "We spent a lot of time looking at auditions and we felt so confident once we landed on those two. That was the anchor. They had great chemistry and we knew that they could really bring something special. So much of bringing this type of movie to life is not overthinking or

Pilou Asbaek as the shady Richard Straker.

Yes, it's *that* scene again. Sweet dreams, everyone!

overcompensating to make it too dramatically different from what it ultimately is. So we didn't want to go too far afield and completely reinvent it, because we knew our audience was going to expect that scene to play out in a way that they are familiar with.

"Bringing Gary's style to it, and with these two great actors, we felt like it really delivered on the expectations."

The vampiric Barlow is also clearly inspired by the Nosferatu-a-like creature of the '79 mini-series, rather than the cultured, distinctly human figure found in King's prose.

"Tobe Hooper's Barlow had haunted all of us, me, James and Gary," smiles Clear, acknowledging the debt. "When something like that is in your nightmares you would be doing a disservice to the movie by not bringing to life the thing that was terrifying to you.

"It's similar to the Danny at the window scene, where we wanted to capture the essence of the thing that has stuck inside of our brains for so long.

"We were fortunate to have Justin Raleigh from Fractured FX, who we've worked with a lot, with us in that exploration of capturing the elements of the Tobe Hooper version that really struck us, while allowing us to put a little bit of our own spin on it."

The Marsten house was built from scratch.

Another crucial visual for the production was the Marsten house, Barlow's lair and the locus of the town's evil.

"We always knew we wanted to create it ourselves," says Clear of the mansion's forbidding exterior. "Just the specialness of that house, the way it looms over the town. It is, in essence, the spectre of the town. We knew it needed to be specific and unique, so we knew from the start that we would be building that façade.

"Our production designer Marc Fisichella did a great job of finding inspirations, different elements from different architecture that has existed before but putting it all together in a unique way. Once we were able to find that location, perched up on the hill, it really felt like it came to life as this entity, essentially, that watches over the town. Integrating that and making it feel like it's ever-present wherever you are was one of Gary's big priorities."

> **"The audience wants to be there and they want to connect with these characters"**

Salem's Lot remains a precious creation for Stephen King. As the blockbuster follow-up to his 1974 debut *Carrie* it proved he was no one-book wonder. "I have a special cold spot in my heart for it!" Maine's horror master declared in the '80s, and this seemingly endless afterlife of adaptations proves he's not alone.

"Everything he does connects so well to an everyday viewer," says Clear, reflecting on the tale's enduring appeal. "We want the audience to slip their feet into the shoes of the characters in the story.

"There's an accessibility to it from the start. Just don't screw it up! He's already given you the keys. The door is open. The audience wants to be there and they want to connect with these characters.

"So much of it is just making sure you don't lose that in the translation."

Salem's Lot is released on 11 October.

"Keep quiet!" "What?" "I SAID... oh never mind."

THE SOUND

YOU WON'T WANT TO MAKE A NOISE WHILE PLAYING NEW VIDEO

SET IN A POST-APOCALYPTIC world that's been invaded by fearsome extraterrestrials with heightened hearing, noise – or a lack of it – is an essential element in the three *A Quiet Place* films to date. Leading a hushed existence is equally important in Stormind and Saber Interactive's new single-player videogame *A Quiet Place: The Road Ahead*, if you want to avoid the clutches of the aurally acute aliens.

"Sound plays a crucial role in *The Road Ahead*, much like in the films," says Stormind Sound Designer Diego Sambataro. "The game emphasises the ambient sounds of the environment over action-related sounds to create an atmosphere of tension and silence.

"The absence of external events reinforces the sense of isolation, making the sounds of the player's actions – such as footsteps – more pronounced and integral to the gameplay. Unlike in other videogames, where footsteps are typically a minor aesthetic detail, in *The Road Ahead* they're a key gameplay element.

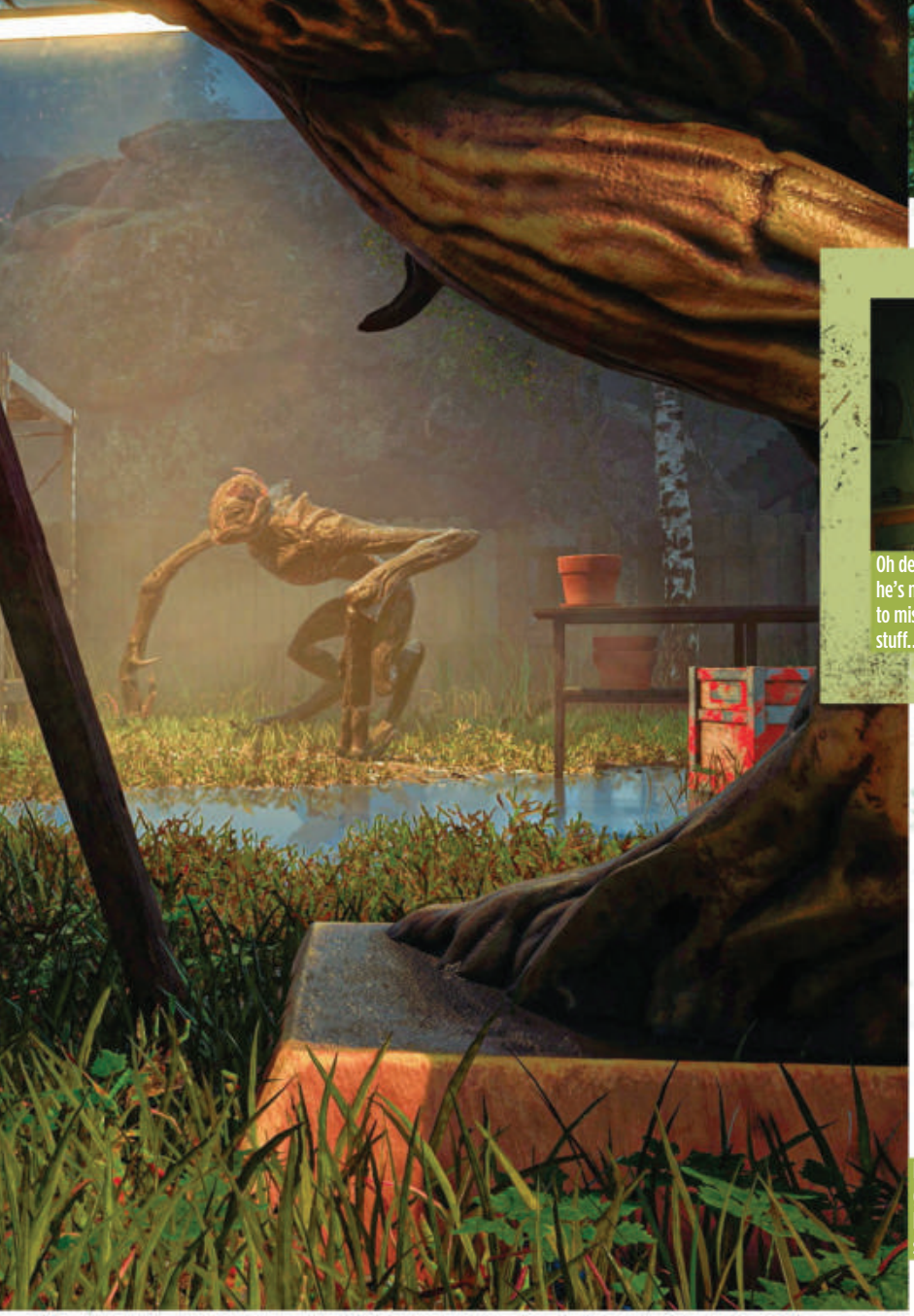
"Players need to listen carefully and recognise these sounds as they contrast sharply with the otherwise silent surroundings, making sound design a vital aspect of the overall experience."

As a musician, making a racket is central to main character Alex's life, while her medical condition also has an impact. "Alex is an asthmatic, which adds an extra layer of challenge to her survival, while her musical talents give her an edge," explains Senior Narrative Designer Luca Esposito. "She has technical skills with synthesisers and a good understanding of electronic circuits, which can be incredibly useful for survival and also has direct implications for gameplay."

Taking place a few months before the events of *A Quiet Place*, *The Road Ahead* acts as a bridge between the original film and this year's prequel *A Quiet Place: Day One*. "By setting the game in this timeframe, it allows the players to explore the world and its dangers just before the narrative of the first movie begins," explains Esposito, who stresses that *The Road Ahead* has no direct connection with any of the films.

"They are set in different locations and feature entirely different characters, offering parallel stories that occur at different points in time," he adds. "While the game draws on the same universe, maintaining the thematic and atmospheric consistency seen in the films, it doesn't directly reference or intersect with the specific characters or scenarios from the movie. Instead, it provides a unique story that complements the larger narrative."

This means we'll also meet a whole new supporting cast. "Players will encounter several other characters, all connected to Alex, either as part of her biological family or her chosen family," continues Esposito. "These characters



Rig up some gadgets to help with survival.

Oh dear. Still, he's not going to miss his stuff...

OF SILENCE

GAME **A QUIET PLACE: THE ROAD AHEAD** WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**

Probably not a game for the fainthearted, all told.

are integral to the story, and players will have the opportunity to get to know them in depth as the narrative unfolds."

With Alex having lost her mother a year before Day One when the creatures fatefully arrived on Earth, family lies at the heart of *The Road Ahead*, just as it did in *A Quiet Place* and its sequel. "Human relationships, whether within a traditional family or between different families are a fundamental pillar of the *A Quiet Place* universe," says Esposito. "So while *The Road Ahead* doesn't feature any direct references to characters from the films, and all the characters are new and original, the importance of family relationships is a key theme. In the game, these relationships are pushed to the extreme due to the extraordinary and dangerous circumstances the characters face.

"Players will see how families and their connections are tested in these challenging situations, similar to how the relationships were explored in the first two films. However, *The Road Ahead* showcases different and new dynamics, providing a unique take on how these bonds evolve in such a tense environment."

> **"The importance of family relationships is a key theme"**

We'll also get up closer to the aliens themselves. "We designed the creatures by using the models provided by Paramount Pictures, which were originally created for film production," explains lead 3D Character Artist Omar Scala. "Our main task was to optimise these models to ensure they performed well within the game environment, which involved significant work on optimising and reworking textures and creating new rigs and animations.

"However, we were very careful not to alter the design or the shapes of the models, as these were canonical and recognisable elements essential for maintaining both narrative and aesthetic continuity. We also designed the animations to replicate those seen in the films.

"Although we cannot say too much about the creatures at the moment, what we can say is that, for the first time, players will experience them in the first person rather than as spectators. This will definitely give them a new perspective on things – you'll see!"

A Quiet Place: The Road Ahead is out on 17 October for PC, PS5 and Xbox Series X|S.

BEING HUMAN EVOLUTION

IT MAY HAVE BEEN AN INSTANT HIT, BUT BBC THREE'S DARKLY COMIC DRAMA ABOUT A HOUSE-SHARING VAMPIRE/WEREWOLF/GHOST TRIO HAD A STRANGE JOURNEY TO THE SCREEN, SERIES CREATOR TOBY WHITHOUSE TELLS *SFX*

WORDS: **DAVE GOLDER**

"WE LEFT THAT MEETING thinking, 'Okay, this is never gonna get made,'" recalls *Being Human* creator Toby Whithouse about the frustratingly twisty-turny path his cult supernatural hit took to make it to the screen. He was on his umpteenth attempt to nail the format and the tone of a show that had started as a very different beast, and decided there was only one way to go.

"I wrote a script only I would enjoy. That was absolutely just my voice undiluted. Never mind about the response, I'm just gonna write this for me. After that, I think very little changed."

Long-term *SFX* readers will know what *Being Human* became – an often very dark, supernatural comedy drama about a werewolf, a vampire and a ghost sharing a house, while trying to bury the more awkward sides of their natures and integrate with normal human society. It also achieved a rare casting alchemy, with four of its then virtually unknown leads – Aidan Turner as vampire Mitchell, Russell Tovey as werewolf George, Lenora Crichlow as ghost Annie and Jason Watkins as the off-puttingly mundane vampire boss Herrick – all going on to serious stardom.

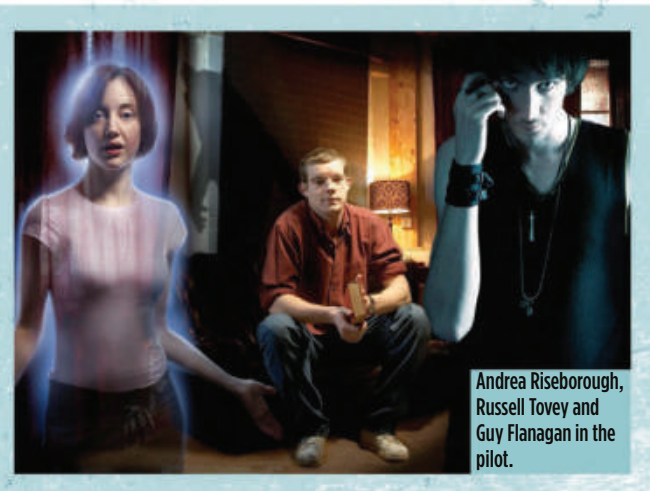
But originally the show idea that became *Being Human* had no supernatural elements, and even when it did finally evolve into a supernatural pilot on BBC Three in 2008, its future was far from assured.

So what would that original non-supernatural version of *Being Human* have been like? "Awful!" laughs Whithouse. "Matt Bouch, who produced seasons one and two, approached me and brought me together with the production company Touchpaper. The plan was, 'Let's do a show about a group of college friends who buy a house together, and the stresses and strains that puts on their relationships.'

Whithouse admits the idea didn't grab him but he started mulling it over anyway. "I was walking home one day, and the ideas for the three human characters just kind of popped. Annie, Mitchell and George – the three of them just suddenly arrived. Mitchell was a recovering sex addict, George had anger issues and Annie was borderline agoraphobic. So I slightly reluctantly went back and said, 'Okay, yes, I'll do it, because I've got these three characters that I think fit well with this.'

"In the meantime, I was developing an idea for a short film, a romantic comedy about werewolves, called *Mild Thing*. It had this character called George, which was the same name as the character in this house-share thing. Ultimately they were the same character, because I just couldn't think of an alternative.

"So then I went back to developing this house-share thing.



Andrea Riseborough, Russell Tovey and Guy Flanagan in the pilot.

ALL PICTURES © BBC; PORTRAITS BY TODD ANTONY

GIVE BLOOD

Herrick (Jason Watkins) and Mitchell (Aidan Turner).

We were getting nowhere. I said, 'Why don't we make George a werewolf?' If nothing else, that'll give us a story for the first episode. Then it just kind of fell into place: Mitchell is a bit like a vampire, Annie's a bit of a ghost. So by the end of the meeting, it was a vampire, a ghost and a werewolf sharing a house. I think we all left that meeting thinking, 'That's never going to get made.'"

But Whithouse ploughed on. He abandoned his first supernatural take on the house-share idea, though, feeling it was too self-conscious about its own silly conceit: "It just wasn't very good." That's when he tried the course correction, just writing the script that he wanted to see. Finally it all clicked into place. The whole process to that point, he estimates, had taken about 18 months and in all that time it never had a name. "The fact that we could never think of a name for the human house-share one tells you everything."

> **"If I had known that it was going to be our first episode I would have done it differently"**

Then in came BBC Three, which was commissioning a pilots season for 2008. They would all air, and one would go to a series.

George and Mitchell have a bit of a barney.

It's that awkward time of the month for George.

Before *Being Human*'s pilot had even aired, the BBC has chosen one of its competitors, *Phoo Action* – a highly stylised martial arts caper based on a comic strip by *Tank Girl* and Gorillaz creator Jamie Hewlett – to receive the full commission.

Whithouse recalls being less than delighted. He's never seen *Phoo Action* to this day. "We were never told how the decision would be made. I think we assumed that audience reaction would play some part in it, and you're only going to get audience reaction post-broadcast.

"Fun fact is," he adds sardonically, "the decision that it was *Phoo Action* happened on the day my dad died. So yeah, it wasn't a great day..."

Then, legendarily, a journalist on a local paper in Reading (and erstwhile *SFX* contributor) Narin Bahar started a petition to save the show, which gained a great deal of traction. Though perhaps just as vital to *Being Human*'s survival was the poor audience reaction to *Phoo Action*.

"I've heard two completely contradictory things from people who were commissioning editors at the BBC at the time," says Whithouse. "One told me very, very tartly that the petition had absolutely nothing to do with the decision and how dare I suggest that! Then another commissioning editor told Narin, 'Oh god, yes, it made all the difference. That was what swung it.' So, you know, draw your own conclusions.

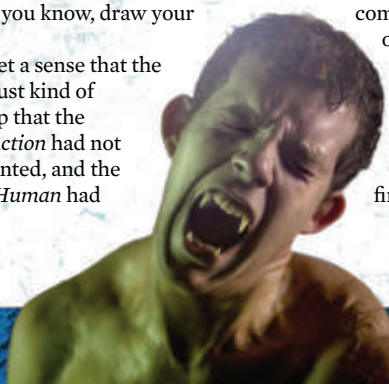
"We started to get a sense that the tide was turning. Just kind of rumours and gossip that the response to *Phoo Action* had not been what they wanted, and the response to *Being Human* had been not what anyone had expected. And then, sure enough, the good news."

Aidan Turner filming on series two.

Series four saw a move to Barry Island.

One thing that didn't materialise, though, was a previously promised chance to reshoot the pilot. "Weirdly, that was just never mentioned again." Whithouse believes this leaves the pilot in an odd position when it comes to the show's canonicity, because of the change in cast and the approach to the vampires.

"What then became episode one of the first series has always felt to me like an episode two. If I had known that it was going to be our first episode I probably would have



Lenora Crichlow played Annie in the series.

Herrick (Jason Watkins): not a good vampire boss.

done it slightly differently. Because I think it's a very odd introduction to the show if you haven't seen the pilot. You join it too far into the story."

Not that audiences seemed to mind too much. The series was soon one of BBC Three's biggest hits, earning awards and BAFTA nominations. A second series, with more episodes, saw characters going to some very dark places. Whithouse worries he took it too far and lost some of the humour, but fans lapped it up.

Then there were the major cast changes, with three leads lost in the space of two episodes at the end of series three/start of series four. Internet conspiracy mongers smelled a non-existent rat and behind-the-scenes upheavals, but Whithouse says the departures were pragmatic, and expected. "We weren't going to be the only people that have noticed that they're really, really good actors; they are going to go off and do other stuff. So it didn't worry me at all.

"I wasn't offended by their decision. These people were my friends by this point and so I was very sad to see them go, but at the same time, completely understood it. The storylining process was at such an early stage we didn't have to do the sort of clichéd ripping-stuff-up-and-starting-again thing."

So by the start of series five the show was still about a vampire, a werewolf and a ghost house-sharing, just a different vampire (Hal, played by Damien Molony), ghost (Alex, played by Kate Bracken) and werewolf (Tom, played by Michael Socha).

Then there was the high school-based online spin-off *Becoming Human* (way ahead of its time) with another vampire, werewolf and ghost, plus a US spin-off (though Whithouse's sole involvement in that one was, as he puts it, "taking the cheque").

So was it any wonder that when Whithouse was approached a couple of years ago about the possibility of a *Being Human* movie, he simply decided that he couldn't think of any more vampire/werewolf/ghost combos.

"The main reason that never happened is I just didn't have another idea for three versions of the characters. Please don't make me do another version. There is no other version!"

How about one where none of them are supernatural? No...?

Being Human is on BBC iPlayer. Read more about Being Human in the next issue of SFX.

Sinead Keenan as Nina and Michael Socha as Tom.

Hal (Damien Molony, left) joined in series four.

A NO-"FRILLS" APPROACH

The reasons for major cast changes after the pilot

In the pilot Andrea Riseborough (shown below) played Annie, Guy Flanagan played Mitchell and Adrian Lester was a far more stereotypical vampire boss. So why were they replaced for the series?

Whithouse explains: "Between the pilot being made and the series being commissioned, Andrea's career was already rocketing into the stratosphere. There was simply no way we were going to get her for multiple seasons of a micro-budget BBC Three show. Straight away the constellation was shifting.

"Also, a pilot is a learning process for the writer. Seeing it on screen, hearing how the dialogue sounds in the actors' mouths, I had to process all that data. The biggest adjustment was the tone of the vampires. In the pilot they were too Anne Rice – frilly and ominous, and at odds with the tone of the show.

"I remember when it 'clicked' for me. It was the little bit of dialogue about Annie making endless cups of tea because it made her feel human, and the house being littered with mugs of cold tea.

"I remember writing that bit and sitting back and thinking, 'Is that just too silly?' But instinctively I knew it was right, and it became an aspect that people really liked.

"Because despite all my big talk in every interview I've ever done about *Being Human*, about how life is a mixture of genres and tones, the juxtaposition of Annie making endless cups of tea versus the leather-and-lace vampire world just felt too jarring. So the vampire world had to shift.

"I felt awful for Guy Flanagan, because I was an actor, and you can guarantee that if I'd been in a successful pilot and one of the characters was going to be recast, it would've been me!"

COMING TO AMERICA

THE MOGWAI LIVE THE AMERICAN DREAM IN THEIR SECOND CHAPTER, GREMLINS: THE WILD BATCH WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**

WHO WOULD HAVE GUESSED in the year that Joe Dante's *Gremlins* turns 40 that audiences would be getting new stories that expand the Mogwai mythology? The next chapter of the animated prequel series, *Gremlins: The Wild Batch*, returns for the spooky season with major guest voices, a whole new continent to mess up and Easter eggs galore.

Creator Tze Chun and co-showrunner Brendan Hay tell *SFX* that after an initial season of establishing how young Sam Wing (Izaac Wang) met a young Gizmo the Mogwai, the series is broadening its ambition by adding more magic and shifting locales from Shanghai to San Francisco.

"We really wanted season two to be an East meets West of American mythology and Chinese mythology," Chun says. "One thing that Brendan and I always talked about in the writers' room was that we want this to be a very serialised show. Even though there's 'monsters of the week,' the characters progress and they get older. They learn things and their friendships change.

"It was really important to us to tell a very emotional story for each of our characters, but also go even deeper with the characters. Season one [asked], how did Gizmo meet the old Mr Wing (Keye Luke) from the original movies? Season two is about, how did they make their first steps into America?"

"Welcome to Chinatown, chump!"

Prepare for mysticism as East meets West.

> **"The characters progress and they get older. They learn things"**

This new season has the characters splitting up for new pursuits. Sam, a troubled Elle (Gabrielle Nevaeh Green) and an increasingly unstable Gizmo will travel to San Francisco to seek answers.

Meanwhile Sam's parents, Fong (Ming-Na Wen) and Hon (BD Wong) – named after Chun's own parents – give chase by boat to follow. In San Francisco's famed Chinatown, they'll find it overrun with gremlins ruled by a boss version of Noggin (George Takei).

"Something we talked about a lot with the writers is that the Mogwai, and especially someone like Noggin, are kind of like immigrant stand-ins," Chun says. "We're telling an immigrant story through the lens of *Gremlins*, which is just so fun." Hay says the story arcs this season will go further with the supernatural, the new West theme of the city and even add another rule to the sacred Mogwai mythology.

"Now that the ground rules have been set, we can run with it more and this was also our chance to get even a little weirder," Hay laughs. "Like, can we do an episode that's from an evil Mogwai point of view the whole way through? Can we put them into even stranger situations? Can we pull from American mythology and can we pull from Chinese mythology? It was our chance to up our game."

New characters will be introduced, like the roguish, smuggler Chang (Simu Liu), who ends up helping Sam, Elle and Gizmo on Alcatraz Island. "We wanted to figure out an Asian American character that we haven't really seen before in this time period," Chun says of Chang. "He's fast-talking, charismatic and handsome. We kept on referring to him as the coolest guy in the world and you see Sam get really starry-eyed."

The season will also see a Clamp family ancestor – think *Gremlins 2* – with the always game John Glover returning to the fold. "He was a delight," Hays gushes about Glover's work. "Honestly, if we had wanted to record three more hours with him, he would have.

"Everybody that we've brought back, they all have fond memories of working on the original films. They still have a love and a passion for their work. It's like a camp reunion of people just coming back to have fun again."

With Dante and Steven Spielberg chiming in on what the show's doing, Chun says that's made working on the series even more special. "Having the people who were there from the very beginning, like Spielberg and [Dante], weighing in on early drafts, it's just been really wonderful to have that seal of approval," he shares. "As you take on adding to this property, it's great for the crew and the writers to all know that the people who created it are excited about it."

Looking ahead, Chun says they hope Max orders more seasons because they've got an abundance of story avenues to explore. "While we want each season to be really satisfactory at the end of it – not just from a plot standpoint, but also emotionally – there are so many stories to tell with these characters," Chun confirms.

"If you look at what Mr Wing looks like in the first [two] movies and how old he is, there's *so* much ground to cover."

Gremlins: The Wild Batch is on Max from 3 October. UK details are TBC.

MUNSTER MASH!

PRODUCTION HELL, SHOCK RECASTING AND HOTLY CONTESTED AUTHORSHIP. AS THE MUNSTERS CELEBRATE THEIR 60TH ANNIVERSARY, WE UNCOVER HOW THE SPOOKY SITCOM WAS ALMOST DEAD ON ARRIVAL

WORDS: **STUART MANNING WITH ZACH SMOTHERS**

THE '60S WAS A DECADE OF THE monsters, as US TV stations hoovered up Universal's old horror films to pad out their schedules. On first release, the movies had skirted controversy and censorship, but now Frankenstein's monster and Dracula were familiar childhood figures, lending their sinister faces to everything from Aurora model kits to the pun-laden pages of *Famous Monsters Of Filmland*.

Far from frightening, they were now friendly. Between the army of young monster devotees and the burgeoning trend for high-concept TV sitcoms – everything from talking horses to wisecracking Martians – a spoof horror show was pretty much inevitable.

Enter Allan Burns and Chris Hayward, jobbing writers for kids' cartoon *The Adventures Of Rocky And Bullwinkle*. In early 1963, they developed an idea that Burns recalled as a "family of weird, offbeat characters" called *Meet The Munsters* – the name derived from "fun monsters". The one-gag premise – albeit an entertaining one – was that the family was oblivious to its terrifying appearance, leading to culture clashes with their picture-perfect suburban neighbourhood.

The gang in the "Munster Koach" at the premiere.

Burns and Hayward first envisaged their Munsters idea as an animated series and pitched it to literary agent Les Colodny at the Ashley-Famous Agency, who specialised in packaging TV formats. After a few promising meetings, they stopped hearing back. Colodny, meanwhile, had scored a new job as an exec at Revue, Universal Studios' television division, tasked with developing new shows. He wanted to make *Meet The Munsters* into a live-action sitcom, and set Burns and Hayward to work.

The writers submitted a treatment in mid-April, with early →

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versions of the characters: cadaverous head of the household Edgar, wife Lucretia, malevolent father-in-law Zoltan, son Thor and plain – ie. normal – niece Lorrie. By mid-June, a revised document had most of the format nailed down; Herman, Grandpa, Eddie and Marilyn's names were all in place, with the wife now called Phoebe. But Burns and Hayward's names were nowhere to be seen – *Meet The Munsters* was now the creation of prolific sitcom writers Norm Liebmann and Ed Haas, working under contract at Universal Studios.

Liebmann had started out as a nightclub musician and Haas as a commercial artist. Their treatment came complete with a Haas cartoon, depicting a lumbering Frankenstein's monster father, a wraithlike wife with a puckered mouth, a bald goblin-like child brandishing a noose, and a devilish grandpa not unlike lugubrious Universal horror actor John Carradine.

Unbeknown to Burns and Hayward, Colodny had been passing off their ideas as his own for Liebmann and Haas to develop. A messy arbitration process would follow, with *The Munsters* emerging with no overall creator.

"It really is a great deal different than the original concept," Norm Liebmann claimed during a 1965 radio interview. "The original didn't work. We really developed the show."

"The original idea... [was] a family of vampires," added Ed Haas. "The one big change we made... was that instead of making them terrifying people, we made them loveable. That's where the comedy element came into it and situations began to work."

The broadcast show owed most to Liebmann and Haas, but Colodny did make a couple of key contributions. He seems to have been the one who had the idea to plug in Universal's horror IP and base the Munsters on the classic monster designs. It was likely also him who tapped fellow New Yorker Fred Gwynne to play friendly Frankenstein's monster Herman. But while Colodny injected *The Munsters* with added commercial appeal, his idea wasn't fresh; animator Bob Clampett had pitched a monster family cartoon to Universal back in the '40s, with drawings of a smiling "Frankie Monster", as he called it.

Ed Haas and Norm Liebmann, with Fred Gwynne.

In later years, Les Colodny claimed total credit for devising *The Munsters*. "What happened was, Mr Wasserman, who was head of the studio, called me in," he told *Times Union* in 2010. "'We have these monster pictures. Why don't you go over and screen them and see if you can make a series out of them.' Well, I went over and saw maybe three of them and I got hysterical, so I created *The Munsters*."

By August 1963, Liebmann and Haas had written their first full script, "Love Thy Munster", in which Grandpa whipped up a love potion in his laboratory to perk up winsome Marilyn's love life. With a few revisions, it would become the show's pilot episode, "My Fair Munster". The first press coverage for *The Munsters* announced it as a starring vehicle for New York actors Fred Gwynne and Al Lewis. The pair had just wound up their roles as bumbling cops on NBC sitcom *Car 54, Where Are You?*. Although other names were mooted during early development, they were the only serious contenders to play Herman and Grandpa.

Nate Derman and Joan Marshall in the pilot.

> **"The one big change was instead of making them terrifying, we made them loveable"**

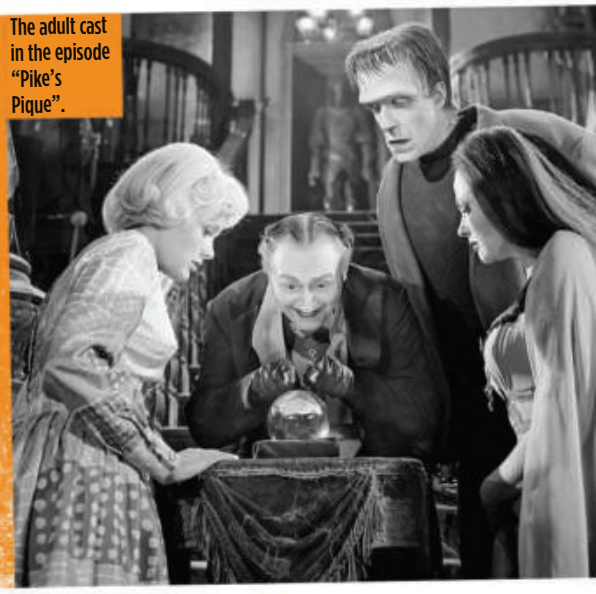
Soon after, Joan Marshall was cast as the macabre matriarch, Phoebe. Marshall was a bit-part player who had dated director Howard Hawks and later married director Hal Ashby. Rounding out the cast were 25-year-old Beverley Owen as Marilyn and child actor Nate "Happy" Derman as Eddie.

"I was a very happy baby, so my mom nicknamed me Happy," Derman explains today. His father was a comedy writer for Milton Berle, who had a sideline doing stage illusions. Young Happy followed in his footsteps, billed as child magician "Nate the Great". He performed some magic for Liebmann and Haas at his Munsters audition. "I had learned my first magic trick at eight. That seemed to wow them and I got the part."

Universal opted not to produce a full *Munsters* pilot, instead shooting an abbreviated 15-minute presentation as a contender for the CBS network's autumn 1964 season. "On that first day, when we walked into the commissary [canteen], they didn't realise what a stir it would cause," recalls Derman. "People hadn't seen Frankenstein's monster or the Wolfman

Al Lewis and Beverley Owen in "My Fair Munster".

Yvonne De Carlo as Lily, with Fred Gwynne.



The adult cast in the episode "Pike's Pique".

PICTURES © UNIVERSAL, CBS/GETTY, ZACH SMOTHERS COLLECTION

Giving the Munster Koach a bit of a tune-up.

or Count Dracula for *years*. Everybody just gasped. For the rest of the week, we had to have lunch in our trailers."

The presentation was filmed in haste on 4 and 5 February, using existing sets at Universal Studios and produced in colour, with music grabbed from a Doris Day movie. Three days later, the edited reel was screened for CBS in New York and sold on the spot. *The Munsters* was in business.

Universal moved quickly to cash in on the show's horror movie appeal, announcing a product tie-in blitz. CBS paid around $65,000 an episode against a $60,000 production budget, so Universal always envisaged merchandising as the show's main source of revenue. *The Munsters* was one of the first TV shows conceived specifically around commercial exploitation – the same model later used for *Batman*. A special Munster car was proposed by the licensing department and duly added to the storylines; George Barris's custom hot-rod hearse became a bestselling model kit.

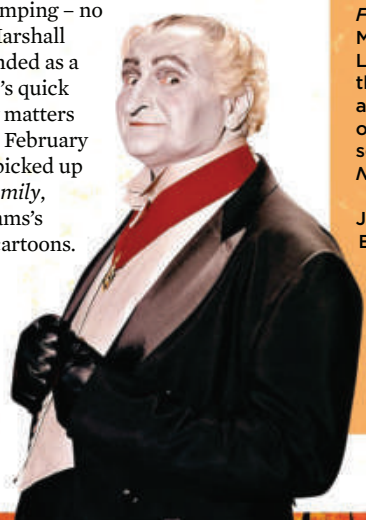
Meanwhile, changes were made ahead of regular production. Colour filming was out (CBS wouldn't begin transferring to colour broadcasts until the following season), and it was decided to recast Eddie and Phoebe, now named Lily.

Eddie, presented in the pilot as a monstrous delinquent, was always going to be a difficult character to sustain. "Please do not have Eddie throw a knife at his mother," reads one network memo. "This was not the kid that went to the elementary school down the block," Nate Derman concedes.

The growling wolf-boy was nixed in favour of a more golly-gee, average American kid and Derman was out. "I had a contract for $750 a week. [Director] Norman Abbot gave me a guest role on *The Jack Benny Show* because he felt sorry that they tore up my contract. He was amazing."

Phoebe also needed revamping – no pun intended – and Joan Marshall may always have been intended as a placeholder, given the pilot's quick turnaround. Compounding matters was rival network ABC's 21 February announcement that it had picked up new sitcom *The Addams Family*, adapted from Charles Addams's blackly comic *New Yorker* cartoons.

The similarities were undeniable; many early *Munsters* press write-ups had described the show as "Charles Addams-like". "We were going to sue →



MUNSTER MAYBES

Who else was in the running to play the ghoulish characters?

The Wizard Of Oz's Cowardly Lion Bert Lahr and John Carradine were both early thoughts for Grandpa, but their ages would have made the grind of weekly filming hard-going. *Lost In Space*'s Billy Mumy was considered for Eddie, but his parents balked at the make-up demands.

Former *Vogue* model Dee Hartford, a one-time Mrs Howard Hawkes, was an early reject for Phoebe. Powerhouse actor Cloris Leachman, later *Young Frankenstein*'s Frau Blücher, was approached but was seemingly uninterested. Alice Ghostley, later *Bewitched*'s quavering Esmeralda, was also suggested.

When the decision was made to recast Lily and Eddie, producers looked further afield. Dodo Denney, later Mike TeeVee's mother in *Willy Wonka And The Chocolate Factory*, screen-tested for the Munster mum; Broadway actor Lisa Kirk, who had originated the lead role in *Kiss Me Kate*, and Nita Talbot, a regular guest on *Hogan's Heroes*, were also seen, along with *The Flying Nun*'s Madeleine Sherwood.

Child actors Mike Barton and Jimmy Stiles screen-tested for Eddie second time around. Both boys later appeared in the season two *Munsters* episode "Zombo"... which guest-starred unsuccessful second-round Grandpa auditionee Louis Nye. Small world!

LEONARD NONES/CONDÉ NAST VIA GETTY

Not a bad gig for a ten-year-old, all told...

them," Addams told *The Los Angeles Times* in 1965. "The art editor of the *New Yorker* met a CBS executive on a commuter train... and told him I might be suing. The CBS executive said, 'I thought we were already paying him a royalty.'"

It's unknown if legal warning shots were fired, but Phoebe's resemblance to Morticia Addams in her slinky black dress was too close for comfort either way. Ironically, Morticia actress Carolyn Jones had appeared on an early *Munsters* casting wish list with an accompanying note: "Perfect – won't do it in a million years"!

GILDED LILY

New auditions for Lily and Eddie began in early March, with screen tests in mid-April. Ten-year-old Butch Patrick had been guesting on the rural sitcom *The Real McCoys* when *The Munsters* came calling. "I had moved to Illinois with my grandmother while my mom moved to the East Coast with her new husband and my little sister and their toddlers," he says today. "So I was in Illinois and they flew me out to the studio to do the screen test."

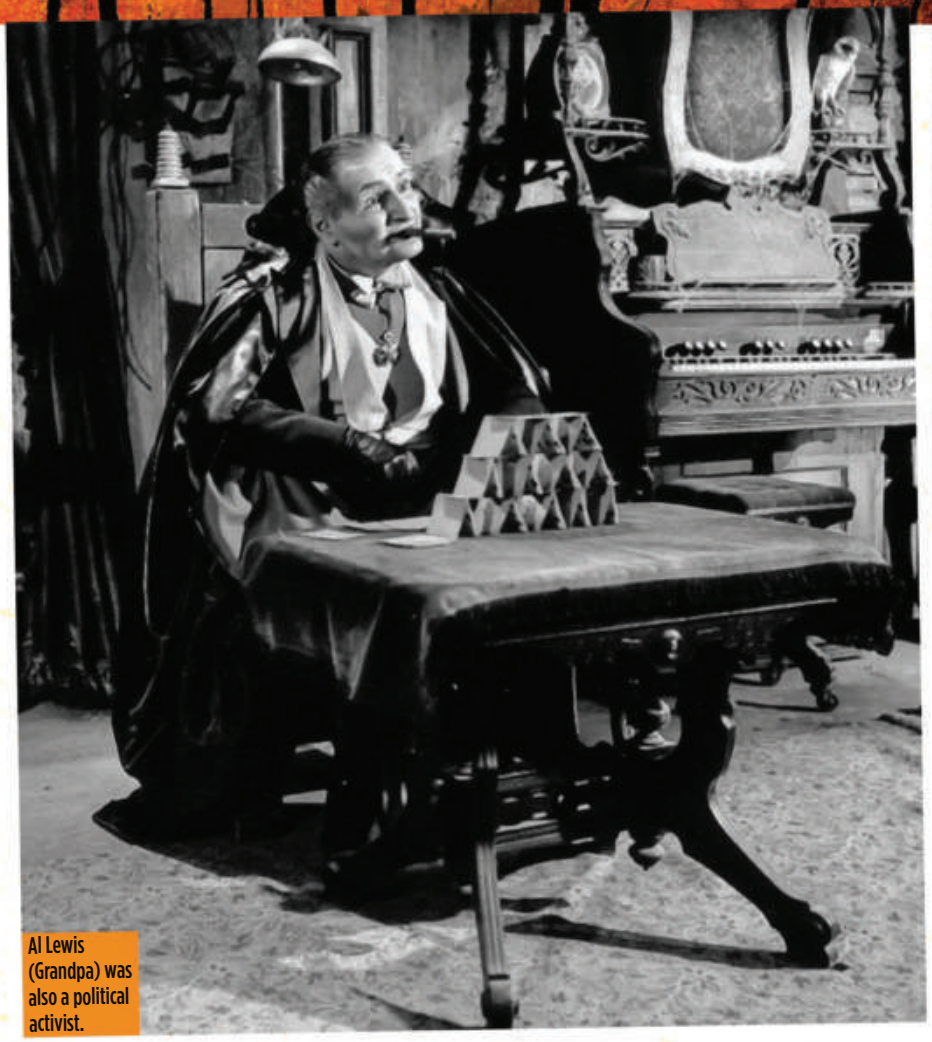
For his audition and initial filming, Patrick was given pointy ears but kept his own side-parted hair. "I guess they looked at the dailies and said, 'He's not weird enough to be believable as the offspring of Herman and Lily'. So [make-up artist] Mike Westmore then developed the widow's peak and the bushy eyebrows, which became my signature look."

Yvonne De Carlo, a pin-up star of so-called "sword and sandal" epics for Cecil B DeMille, was cast as Lily. At 41, she was past her heyday and dogged with money woes after her stuntman husband Bob Morgan was injured making *How The West Was Won*. She'd never done episodic TV but needed regular income. "I couldn't be fussy," she told *TV Guide*.

To tone down the Addams comparisons, De Carlo was given a flowing white gown, lightning-style streaks in her wig – which the actor loathed – and slate-grey, witchy make-up. "It's wearisome," she told the press, "but no worse than being made up as a glamour doll. They used to spend an hour on my hair alone... I like to take time with my nails and my wig, and I put on all the body make-up myself."

The new casting was met with dismay by Gwynne and Lewis, who complained to the producers, citing De Carlo's lack of comic experience; in truth, both were likely more bothered by her place in the pecking order. "They were TV stars," says Butch Patrick. "She was a movie star and still had movie-star status. Yvonne had a dressing room; she had a phone

Butch Patrick as the newer, less scary Eddie.



Al Lewis (Grandpa) was also a political activist.

"I like to take time with my nails and my wig, and I put on all the body make-up myself"

that would ring and would cause them to stop filming. They didn't think she could be funny – and they were wrong."

De Carlo was no pushover, and eventually won Gwynne and Lewis over. "The men, being New Yorkers, kid me a lot about the picture business, the industry," she said at the time. "I tell those two, I've worked with the best... and I know how to handle myself."

With the new cast in place, a full-length black-and-white version of "My Fair Munster" was filmed on the newly-constructed Munster house sets from 27-29 April, with retakes the following week. Viewing the finished episode, CBS had reservations about Al Lewis's performance and called a halt while they considered recasting.

The hiatus made the trade papers, who reported that the network was worried that Lewis's Grandpa wasn't a sufficiently "comic, loveable Dracula." CBS' output was aimed squarely at middle America, so Lewis' Russian-Jewish roots and broad *Noo Yawk* accent may have raised some eyebrows internally; network executive Hunt Stromberg Jr reportedly described him as a "candy store Fagin". The questionable decision to give Lewis a hooked rubber nose may have added to any unkind stereotypes.

"Stromberg objected to the way the character was played," Lewis explained during a '90s interview, "and in very derogatory terms. I know that they screen-tested because a number of the technicians told me... Hey, this is life – there are people who don't like Jews."

Studio paperwork confirms that Louis Nye screen-tested as Grandpa on June 24, a little over a week before regular filming was to begin. Nye, also Jewish, had appeared on *The Beverly Hillbillies* in a recurring role, so would have been familiar to CBS' top brass. He later filmed a memorable *Munsters* guest spot, playing tacky horror host Zombo.

A memo sent after Nye's test simply reads "not acceptable". Lewis stayed, but the nose went.

The early weeks were gruelling, as cast and crew struggled to keep within the three filming days allocated to each episode. "A Walk On The Mild Side" – in which Herman's mistaken for a nighttime prowler – lingered in front of the camera for two extra days, while many other instalments required pick-ups and reshoots. "We can't make a show in three days like the other 30-minute companies," Al Lewis grumbled a few months into filming. "The

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Owen and Gwynne in "Munster Masquerade".

Gwynne and De Carlo in "Family Portrait".

The family in a promo shot for the second pilot.

other day I had six lines in the lab and it took seven hours to shoot. Setting up all the business takes time."

The elaborate character designs posed headaches too. "The make-up just wasn't working," remembers Butch Patrick. "They went into production with this greasepaint, which they would then powder. About two hours into the shoot, it would dry out and crack, so we were constantly fighting the make-up under the lights." Eventually, Max Factor was tasked with creating a bespoke pan-stick foundation in deathly Munster grey, which held up better, easing the constant rounds of touch-ups.

Beverley Owen, who had been persuaded to do the *Munsters* pilot as a quick assignment, was now desperately unhappy at being shackled to the series long-term. Fellow New Yorkers Gwynne and Lewis showed solidarity and support, and she lived with Gwynne and his family while in Hollywood.

"I sensed that she was very sad," says Patrick. "She had been promised a quick trip to LA for a pay cheque to do a pilot for a week that would never see the light of day. We all knew that she wasn't happy." Homesick and missing her boyfriend, Owen asked to be released from her contract.

Despite developing *The Munsters* and effectively managing the daily production, Norm Liebmann and Ed Haas received no formal credit. For the pilot, Revue TV assigned Joe Connelly, co-creator of their wholesome family comedy *Leave It To Beaver*, as exec producer, with him and his writing partner Bob Mosher becoming *The Munsters*' credited producers for the series. What followed was a lingering tug-of-war over creative control, conducted via terse internal memos.

Connelly rewrote one Liebmann and Haas script extensively without consultation – by their reckoning, not improving it. Another submission by writer Robert Lewin was deemed "unacceptable" and tossed back to the pair to rewrite from scratch.

They butted heads again over the choice of premiere episode; Connelly selected "Munster Masquerade", a script by him and Mosher. Liebmann and Haas felt that its storyline, featuring the Munsters disguised for a fancy dress party, failed to establish the overall premise. "Almost any other segment would be preferable," they argued.

Their cries fell on deaf ears. "Munster Masquerade" went out as the show's opener on 24 September 24 1964. Audiences loved it, with the debut coming in as the clear winner opposite *The Flintstones*; critics were generally less enthusiastic. "*The Munsters*, with all the subtlety of a sledgehammer, beat a tattoo of obvious monsterisms," wrote *Pittsburgh Press* critic Vince Leonard with lofty disdain. "To say the show won't be a hit would take more courage than facing up to Frankenstein inside a graveyard fence."

On Friday 6 November, filming wrapped on "The Sleeping Cutie", the thirteenth episode produced and the last to feature Beverley Owen. The script featured Marilyn trapped in a fairy tale slumber from Grandpa's magic. Owen left quietly and returned to New York. "I don't remember any farewell for Beverley," says Butch Patrick. "I'm sure Fred and Al did something nice but the producers were pissed."

Norm Liebmann and Ed Haas departed the same week. *The Munsters* would shoot a few episodes without a Marilyn while searching for a lookalike. The arrival of Pat Priest as Owen's replacement – relegated initially to brief filmed pick-ups – signalled a change in direction. With Connelly and Mosher now fully in charge, the show lightened up – literally, to simplify the time-consuming shadowy photography – and tonally, with the characters becoming more broad, wholesome and good-natured.

Caleb Dolden, Yvonne Strahovski, and a teacup.

BOILING

TEACUP SHOWRUNNER IAN MCCULLOCH INTRODUCES HIS NOVEL

HORROR WRITERS LOVE TO TELL stories about people stuck behind barriers that bring out the worst in humanity. Clifford D Simak's *All Flesh Is Grass* (1965) to Stephen King's *Under The Dome* (2009) are but two of many instances where the scenario is explored. However, a title in that subgenre that screenwriter Ian McCulloch (*Yellowstone*) did not know was Robert R McCammon's bestselling 1988 novel, *Stinger*.

So when James Wan's production arm Atomic Monster contacted McCulloch gauging his interest in adapting the book into a streaming series for Peacock he literally had to be sent a copy of the book.

"I grew up reading a lot of things like Stephen King but I never heard of Robert McCammon until they said, 'Hey, do you want to do this?'" McCulloch explains to *SFX*. "But then the odd thing about this was, it took me about a week to get through the book, and two weeks later they had the first [script] in their hands."

In the simplest of terms, McCammon's sci-fi/thriller is about two aliens that converge on a rural Texas town. One is sought out by the other to bring them back to their place of origin, and some pesky humans get caught in the middle when a forcefield is engaged.

While *Stinger*'s plot didn't do much for McCulloch, the tension that develops from this very personal cat and mouse dynamic with otherworldly elements did. It spun McCulloch into an intense period of creative inspiration which led to the horror/sci-fi hybrid *Teacup*.

"I think that if I had read the book as a teenager when it came out, I might have felt a little more beholden to it," he says of his take on *Stinger*. "This is a very different kind of adaptation in that it's really the spirit of the thing and the ideas, and not much else." Atomic Monster loved the pilot, and McCulloch reached out to McCammon for his blessing regarding his radically different approach to the book, which he duly received.

In McCulloch's version, the rural Georgia ranch is home to the multigenerational Chenoweth clan, a place fraught with a host of relatable family problems. There's an unnamed tension between parents Maggie (Yvonne Strahovski) and James (Scott Speedman); his mother Ellen (Kathy Baker) has recently moved in due to health issues; and their two kids Arlo (Caleb Dolden) and Meryl (Émilie Bierre) are reacting to the changes. So there's already drama before someone in a gas mask pulls onto their driveway with a terrible directive they must abide by.

Over the course of eight episodes, McCulloch says the tension ratchets up for the Chenoweths, their closest neighbours and more strangers that arrive. "The idea of this is something called a keyhole epic, meaning a ground level story," McCulloch says of the

Arlo Chenoweth meets... something.

POINT

WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**

ADAPTATION OF ROBERT MCCAMMON'S THRILLER, *STINGER*

Luciano Leroux, Chaske Spencer and Diany Rodriguez.

> **"The idea not only was more economical episodes but to leave them wanting more"**

intimate focus. "One of the things that I found exciting was, we're never allowed to make this big. It always has to be small. It always has to stay down level with these people's experience. That means that no matter how large the science fiction or horror stakes are, the other stakes – the human stakes – are just as important."

In fact, *Teacup* unfolds more like a play in the first two episodes, as the audience is thrown into this fishbowl and left to figure out what's going on. "The idea was you take everything away, including exposition, when it comes to character, when it comes to story, and see what happens," he says. "Then throw in some conflicts that are unavoidable."

Good news for the impatient: *Teacup* also doesn't suffer from the bloat that plagues some genre TV shows, because the episodes clock in at a speedy 30 minutes instead of the hour-plus of some dramas.

"I came up as a playwright long, long ago and the idea not only was always shorter, more economical episodes but to leave them wanting more," he says of the show's pace. "The idea of the show is to grow these disparate people in kind of a pot of warm water and then turn up the heat."

Content to let audiences discover what lies at the heart of this adaptation without sharing details, McCulloch does offer that in making the series, he knows the premise is definitely built for more than one season.

"I'll be perfectly honest with you, I don't know what happens in season two," he chuckles. "And I don't know what happens in season three. But I know that the stakes are high enough.

"The challenge will be, how do you keep it the same show? But I think you'll see at the end of the season: 'Oh, okay, I see where they're going.'

"If we were so lucky, then we'll dive back in."

Teacup is on Peacock from 10 October. UK details are TBC.

UNDEAD REFLECTIONS

NEIL JORDAN ON BRINGING ANNE RICE'S MODERN VAMPIRE CLASSIC TO SCREEN, 30 YEARS ON

WORDS: **CLARISSE LOUGHREY**

"YOU ASK YOURSELF THE QUESTION: what would it be like, if you were stuck living forever?" *Interview With The Vampire*'s director Neil Jordan says. "What would it be like, if life were a passage of days that were the same, the same, the same, the same? The fashions change. The cities change. The technology changes, yet you remain the same? That, to me, was a great question."

Time moves on, yet film lives immortal. And, as Jordan's adaptation of Anne Rice's genre-quake of a vampire novel reaches its thirtieth anniversary, he's reflected back on his career's work in a new memoir, titled *Amnesiac*. It's an alluring, unconventional approach to autobiography, that considers the slipperiness of one's own memories.

Jordan follows his childhood in north Dublin, surrounded by both faith and superstition, through to his work with John Boorman on *Excalibur*, and onto the films he both directed and frequently wrote. Several waltzed with the supernatural: his most famous, *Interview With The Vampire* (1994), alongside *The Company Of Wolves* (1984), *High Spirits* (1988) and *Byzantium* (2012).

Two chapters are dedicated to *Interview With The Vampire*, in which Jordan details the fraught but liberating experience of a film "made in an insane glare of publicity". Chief among them is the casting of Tom Cruise as the vampire Lestat de Lioncourt, who unexpectedly descends into the life of Louis de Pointe du Lac (Brad Pitt), a wealthy widower in 1791 Louisiana. Lestat can feel his sorrow. One bite and Louis will be forever freed from →

Tom Cruise (Lestat) and Brad Pitt (Louis).

Molloy (Christian Slater) in... an interview.

the prison of mortality. It's an offer he comes to regret almost as soon as he accepts it.

Cruise, certainly, didn't match Rice's description. "First of all, he's tall. Secondly, he's blond," Jordan explains. "Her ideal Lestat was actually Rutger Hauer, for some reason – perhaps because she'd seen Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. He was a Nordic kind of figure. She admired Jeremy Irons. Daniel Day-Lewis was the favourite when I came on board. Daniel didn't want to do it."

Cruise, at the time, wasn't so far removed from the cocksure dreamboat of *Top Gun* (1986) and *Risky Business* (1983), his stardom defined by that nuclear-grade smile. Jordan had seen him in Oliver Stone's *Born On The Fourth Of July* (1989), in which he played a real-life Vietnam War vet and first rattled the public's expectations ("You look at that and say, 'Okay, that's an actor, apart from being a movie star.'") But this was long before Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) or Michael Mann's *Collateral* (2004). The Cruise we know today was still in nascent form.

He didn't immediately read as otherworldly, ancient, beautiful or aristocratic. Yet Jordan saw otherwise. "When I met Tom, I saw the way into the character. That's the only way I can describe it," he says. "I saw the way into this character who had to live outside of the public gaze in a way." Rice had made her objections to Cruise public (she exclaimed that he was "no more my Vampire Lestat than Edward G Robinson is Rhett Butler"). But she was just as quick to relent when she finally saw what he'd done with the role. Cruise's Lestat is the id made flesh, irresistibly seductive but with a charred and blackened heart.

> **"I think the best thing we did in that movie was actually that we created a family"**

Rice had a two-page ad published in *Variety*. In it, she set the record straight, by writing: "I like to believe Tom's Lestat will be remembered the way Olivier's Hamlet is remembered. Others may play the role some day but no one will ever forget Tom's version of it." Jordan reflects: "With regard to Tom, he's the kind of guy that if you give him a challenge and you say, 'Hey, you're not going to be able to do that', he will do it. That's why he's doing these *Mission: Impossible* movies, and he's jumping off enormous cliffs. I do admire him for that."

For Rice, Jordan's film marked the conclusion of an exhaustive, near two-decade period of development. Executives were reluctant to move forward, and they were upfront about the reason why: Lestat and Louis's bloodlust, and their unshakeable bond, are implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) driven by sexual desire and romantic feeling. Rice, frustrated, at one point rewrote the script to make Louis a woman, with an eye to cast Cher.

Eventually, however, the project ended up in the hands of producer David Geffen, a gay man. A new adaptation was written by Rice (with Louis once again a man) and sent to Jordan. "The script was very theatrical," the director says. "She had tried to modify a lot of aspects of the book in the attempt to get it made. I reintroduced a lot of elements back into the movie. I didn't get a credit for this, but that's fine. It often happens if you're the director, you're in a different position."

Still, speculation was rife about how Louis and Lestat's relationship would be portrayed on screen. "Before I was making the movie, as I was making it," Jordan says. "All these articles and all these programmes on American television: 'Are they normalising the relationship?' 'Are they draining it of sexual content?' The truth is, that wasn't the case at all. It's not about sex. I wish it was a bit more about sex, but it's not really about that.

"I think the best thing we did in that movie was actually that we created a family," he continues. Louis, at first, is driven to torment by his new taste for blood. He feeds from a young girl, Claudia (Kirsten Dunst), recently orphaned. Here, Lestat sees an opportunity. He turns Claudia and, by doing so, binds the two of them to Louis for eternity. The men, in all practical definitions of the word, became her parents. "They're like any couple in a way," says Jordan. "Like a couple that's about to split up and, suddenly, the girlfriend gets pregnant."

It was Dunst's first substantial role, and ultimately her breakthrough. "I've cast many kids in my movies and I always feel very guilty doing it because you know that this will define them in some way," he says. "It's a thing they

Armand (Antonio Banderas) gets handsy.

A 12-year-old Kirsten Dunst played Claudia.

Director Neil Jordan does some Cruise control.

will never escape from, like when I cast Sarah Patterson in *The Company Of Wolves* or Eamonn Owens in *The Butcher Boy*. They're not actors. But the minute I met Kirsten Dunst, I knew she was an actor. So I didn't feel any hesitation whatsoever.

"She's done remarkable things since," he adds. "I think she's gained an enormous amount of sadness – in Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*, she's remarkable. She's great. She can play things like Mary Jane in *Spider-Man*, but she's bigger than that." Pitt, meanwhile, would take a different path.

"Obviously, he wanted a far more muscular career," Jordan says. "I think he felt the passivity of the character, and the fact that we were shooting at night – it kind of wore him down, really. The Brad Pitt that was in *Fight Club*, that muscular guy with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth, it's not the Brad Pitt that was in *Interview With The Vampire*. But that's why he's a great actor, too."

Production commenced under what Jordan would call "a paranoid sense of freedom". Geffen had promised him "no interference whatsoever". But the books had an enormous audience, bolstered by Rice's own affection for her characters (she continued Lestat's story in 12 subsequent sequels, known collectively as The Vampire Chronicles).

"Every time we went to a location, whether it be San Francisco or New Orleans or London or Paris, there were journalists everywhere trying to take pictures," says the director. "It was kind of a weird situation where you were under examination, every step you took, yet you have the studio behind you and the freedom to do what you want."

He was guided, primarily, by his love for Rice's book. But the echoes of childhood left their mark. "I grew up under the shadow of Bram Stoker's house, in Marino in Dublin," he says. "I used to pass it every day when I went to the cinema. I felt a fidelity to both [him and Rice] in a way."

His Irish Catholic background, too, contributed to what he considered "this strange sense of guilt" that pervaded Rice's story. There's a sequence cut from the film in which Louis confesses to a priest, alluding to his vampiric ways. The priest connects the dots and starts to panic. Louis slaughters him at the altar. "There's blood drenched everywhere," he says. "It's very dramatic. Maybe I'll look at a longer version at some stage if they allow me."

Beyond its commercial success, its two Oscar nominations, and an unconnected sequel in 2002's *Queen Of The Damned*, *Interview With The Vampire* has seen its legacy continued by the AMC series, starring Sam Reid and Jacob Anderson. It's a looser adaptation, with its own distinctive viewpoint (the homoeroticism is all text, no subtext), yet it still pays repeated homage to Jordan's film.

Jordan has watched the first season, though he disagrees with the decision to age up Claudia – she's five in the book, around 10 in the film, and 14 in the series. "It's not as horrific if she's older, in a way," he says. "I understand what they did. But it's weird how our kind of self-censorship changes, isn't it?"

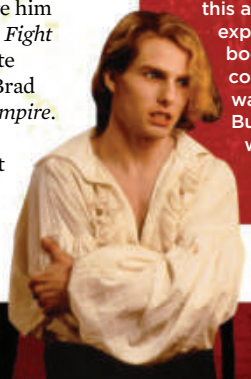
That's the thing about time, Rice's vampires would tell you. Humanity moves forward, but the past keeps pace. And Louis and Lestat have plenty of life left in them still. ●

Amnesiac is out now, published by Bloomsbury.

LESTAT AGAIN

Neil Jordan on his scrapped sequel

"[Rice] wrote *The Vampire Lestat* and she didn't write about Louis again. Warner Bros asked me, you know, they wanted me to do a sequel. So, I did write a version of *The Vampire Lestat* which was never made. Tom Cruise, at the time, he didn't do sequels. Now he's doing sequels, *Top Gun*, and all that. Maybe they were smarter than I was. They said: 'Why don't we do this as a television event and explore all of her subsequent books in a kind of television context?' I thought the idea was not a good enough one. But that's part of the way in which the whole world has changed in that television now has everything."



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SERVICE WITH A SMILE

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU COMBINE 2022 HORROR HIT SMILE WITH TAYLOR SWIFT'S ERAS TOUR? THE ANSWER IS ONE OF 2024'S MOST HOTLY ANTICIPATED SEQUELS... WORDS: **STEVE O'BRIEN**

IN A TIME WHEN AGE-OLD IPS ARE monopolising the movie box office, it's testament to the power of *Smile* that this wholly original story became the highest-grossing horror of 2022. Writer/director Parker Finn's chiller about a psychiatrist who becomes convinced she's being threatened by a supernatural entity was a breakout hit for the Ohio-born filmmaker.

It impressed Paramount enough that they've signed him to helm their Robert Pattinson-starring remake of cult classic *Possession*. In the meantime, however, there's the matter of *Smile 2*. Although – spoiler alert – Sosie Bacon's psychiatrist Rose burned to death at the end of the first film, here we are again, with a sequel that promises to take this freshly minted franchise in a radically different direction. This time, as Finn tells *SFX*, it focuses on a Taylor Swift-like pop sensation by the name of Skye Riley (played by British actor Naomi Scott).

Did you know while you were making the first *Smile* that you'd be doing a sequel?
Not at all, I made the first one to be very self-contained. But when it became clear that there was excitement for a sequel, I wanted to make sure that if I was going to come back that I found a new way that sort of re-lensed things thematically inside of the universe of *Smile*. So the new film is 100% a *Smile* movie, but it also has its own metabolism, its own identity. What I love about it is that people are going to go on this brand new journey that has that familiarity from the first one, but has got all-new ways to unsettle and scare them.

Obviously in the first film, you unmasked "the Entity", as it's called. Does the new movie reveal more about it?
There was information I had for myself that wasn't expressed in the first film that I took the opportunity to bring into the new one, so what *Smile 2* is doing is showing us new things. We felt like we'd uncovered the mystery in the first

Dylan Gelula, left, and Naomi Scott as Skye.

Lukas Gage plays Tom Cruise. We're JOKING.

one, but we've maybe only scooped a single glass of water out of the ocean.

***Smile 2* is centred on a pop star named Skye Riley. How did that idea come about?**
I'm a big fan of pop music, and I'm endlessly fascinated by modern celebrity. It was kind of wild because we developed this story about a pop star and then, as we were starting to think about prep and production, the Eras Tour happened and then Beyoncé's tour. And suddenly it felt like pop music and live events were the biggest thing that anybody was talking about.

The marketing around the film is great – you're releasing music videos and promotional material onto social media as if Skye Riley is a real person.
It was very important to me to make sure that this wasn't a horror film where the character just happens to be a pop star. I wanted it to be part of the core of this film, and that meant we wanted to build a lot of credibility into her. So the challenge was, can we convince an audience that this is a real pop star? We created original songs for the film and there's breathtaking, original choreography. We love this idea of blurring the edges of where the movie ends and reality begins.

> **"What I wanted to make sure was that we didn't do whatever was obvious or easy"**

Kyle Gallner's police officer character Joel is left alive in the first film, having been infected with the curse after witnessing Rose's suicide. He's in *Smile 2*, but it's not centred on him...
In approaching the sequel, what I wanted to make sure was that we didn't do whatever was obvious or easy or anything that people were necessarily anticipating. But at the same time, it was important for me to connect the two films and make sure that they share a universe and really that came down to Joel. It was so much fun to resurrect him and play with that character again. You're going to see another side to him in this one.

Do you have any plans for a third movie?
There are some ideas that I think are very exciting. I think it's really fun to imagine a lineage of *Smile* movies where each one becomes more off the rails than the previous one. What's really interesting about *Smile* is that you can find yourself in different stories, different characters, different worlds.

Your next directing job, however, is a remake of Andrzej Żuławski's 1981 horror *Possession*. How that's going?
It's early days, but we're incredibly excited about this completely bonkers movie. *Possession* is one of my favourite films of all time, and so what was really important to me was that we were honouring the original and staying true to its absolute frenzied, manic ferocity.

We want to make sure that fans of the original, who might be a little suspect of a remake, when they sit down to it are gonna realise, "Oh, this movie is for me, and it's really embracing what I love." At the same time, though, I want to be inviting new fans in. I think there's a really wonderful opportunity that by reimagining this movie, people who haven't seen the 1981 film will go and visit it, so hopefully it'll spread the love.

Smile 2 is in cinemas from 18 October.

SCARY

STORIES TO TELL IN THE DARK

FROM THE RETURN OF EC COMICS TO SCREAM!, THIS YEAR'S HALLOWEEN OFFERS UP **HORROR COMICS** FOR ALL THE AGES

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**

ONE FROM THE VAULTS

With bestselling titles like *Tales From The Crypt* and *The Vault Of Fear*, EC Comics established the template for horror comics before the ensuing moral panic about its often luridly violent content led to the cancellation of almost its entire line in 1956. Now, nearly 70 years later, it's been revived as an imprint at Oni Press, beginning with two anthologies, the sci-fi focused *Cruel Universe* and the more traditional horror of *Epitaphs From The Abyss*.

"Our society today grapples with many of the same issues that EC challenged head on," says Oni publisher and president Hunter Gorinson. "Everything from resurgent fascism and environmental destruction to inequality run amok and old-fashioned war and greed. With an artful attitude and a wry smile, it seemed like an opportune moment to resurrect EC, and for its confrontational spirit to rise from the grave and terrorise a whole new century."

Contributors to the first few issues of *Epitaphs From The Abyss* and *Cruel Universe* include Brian Azzarello, Jason Aaron, Klaus Janson, Charlie Adlard and David Lapham. "I've focused on trying to capture the feel of a classic EC tale while transposing that to a story that would work for today," says writer Christopher Condon.

"In *Epitaphs* 1, Peter Krause and I tell a story about our modern politics and specifically a heated social issue – abortion. In *Cruel Universe* 1, Jonathan Case and I look at a strange phenomenon that's grown out of our advances in technology and medicine – billionaires wanting to live forever. The key is to find something that is vital to our day and age, boil its most horrifying elements down and funnel it through the patented EC sieve."

Epitaphs From The Abyss cover, by James Stokoe.

"The original EC Comics featured twists, turns, gore and memorable art and I've tried to hit those marks in 'Solo Shift', my story with artist Caitlin Yarsky in *Cruel Universe* 1, which is a wicked little locked room mystery," says Corinna Bechko. "For upcoming stories, I tapped that same vein of earlier EC inspiration, but targeted modern concerns and settings."

With *Cruel Universe* concluding after five issues, *Epitaphs From The Abyss* will be joined in December by seasonal special *Shiver SuspenStories* and new series *Cruel Kingdom* in January. According to Gorinsonm this will "break new ground as EC's first ever full-on series set in the dark fantasy genre. We have even more surprises lined up for 2025 and beyond!"

Cruel Universe issue three cover art, by Dave Johnson.

Cruel Universe issue three is out on 3 October and Epitaphs From The Abyss issue four is out on 16 October.

KING OF HORROR

All Hallows' Eve has always been important to John Carpenter, director and co-writer of 1978's original *Halloween*. For the past decade he has released a volume of *Tales For A HalloweeNight*, the flagship anthology of Storm King Comics, which he runs with his wife, television producer Sandy King.

"I've always enjoyed horror comics," says Carpenter. "I loved the days of *Creepy* and *Eerie Comics* and I've also enjoyed superhero comics. Really, all kinds. They're entirely different from my films and music, and a great vehicle to explore a variety of stories. I'm really proud of what Sandy has built up with Storm King, turning it into a powerhouse from the ground up."

While Massive Publishing recently released a sequel to his 1980 film *The Fog*, Carpenter himself prefers to concentrate on original material. "From my point of view, I prefer new work over existing properties," he says. "Through comics and graphic novels, we can take a broad range of different stories, different styles and different subgenres of horror and turn them into something fun and engaging."

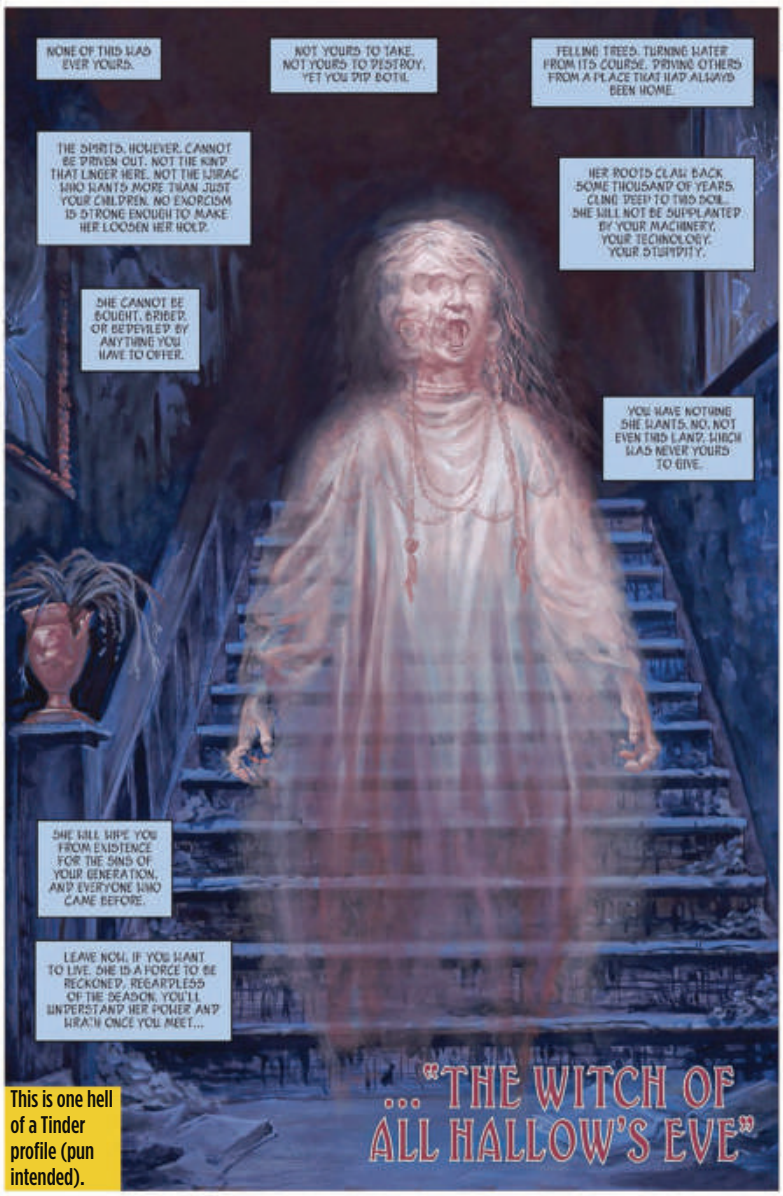
> **"I've wanted to write a Punch and Judy tale for years, inspired by British folklore"**

Collaborating again with artist Luis Guaragna, Carpenter has written the opener to this month's tenth anniversary *Tales For A HalloweeNight*. "'SOS' is about a lost soul in space," he says. "One of the reasons why I enjoyed writing it is working with Luis, as his work and his talent inspire me to write.

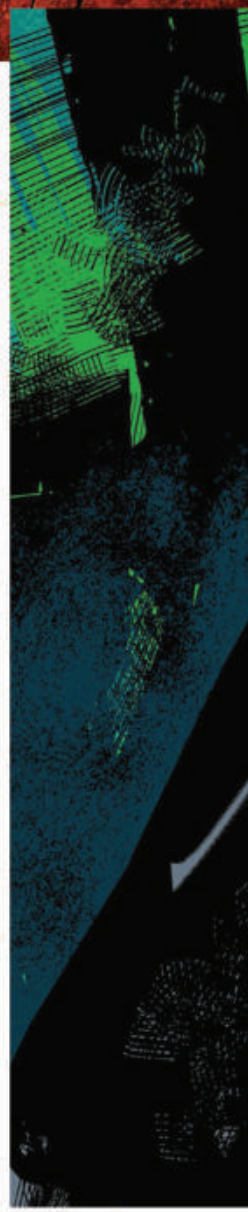
"I like to go in a different direction every year, which allows me to explore whatever is going on in my mind and in my current view of the world," adds King, who has scripted "Traveller Between Worlds" for artist Andrea Mutti. "I was raised on Native American folk tales and have always been fascinated by the skinwalkers. Part of me wondered what happens if you wake up changed as a result of your own behaviour, and so I tend to explore what demons we bring upon ourselves."

While his UK credits include *2000 AD* and *Monster Fun*, Alec Worley also regularly contributes to *Tales For A HalloweeNight*.

Alec Worley's story "The Show Must Go On".


NONE OF THIS WAS EVER YOURS.
NOT YOURS TO TAKE. NOT YOURS TO DESTROY. YET YOU DID BOTH.
FELLING TREES. TURNING WATER FROM ITS COURSE. DRIVING OTHERS FROM A PLACE THAT HAD ALWAYS BEEN HOME.
THE SPIRITS, HOWEVER, CANNOT BE DRIVEN OUT. NOT THE KIND THAT LINGER HERE. NOT THE WRAC WHO WANTS MORE THAN JUST YOUR CHILDREN. NO EXORCISM IS STRONG ENOUGH TO MAKE HER LOOSEN HER HOLD.
HER ROOTS CLAW BACK SOME THOUSAND OF YEARS. CLING DEEP TO THIS SOIL. SHE WILL NOT BE SUPPLANTED BY YOUR MACHINERY, YOUR TECHNOLOGY, YOUR STUPIDITY.
SHE CANNOT BE BOUGHT, BRIBED, OR BEDEVILED BY ANYTHING YOU HAVE TO OFFER.
YOU HAVE NOTHING SHE WANTS. NO. NOT EVEN THIS LAND, WHICH WAS NEVER YOURS TO GIVE.
SHE WILL WIPE YOU FROM EXISTENCE FOR THE SINS OF YOUR GENERATION, AND EVERYONE WHO CAME BEFORE.
LEAVE NOW, IF YOU WANT TO LIVE. SHE IS A FORCE TO BE RECKONED, REGARDLESS OF THE SEASON. YOU'LL UNDERSTAND HER POWER AND WRATH ONCE YOU MEET...
"THE WITCH OF ALL HALLOW'S EVE"

This is one hell of a Tinder profile (pun intended).



"As a Brit writing for an American anthology, I came in feeling like I might have to Americanise what I'm pitching, but Sandy and Sean [Sobczak, editor] have been open to letting me write stories based on British council estates or rundown seaside towns," he says.

"Last year artist David Hitchcock, colourist Jack Mandrake and I did 'These Walls', which is a haunted house story told from the point of view of the house itself. This year's story 'The Show Must Go On' is about a little girl who disrupts a sinister Punch and Judy show, whose puppets demand a terrible tribute that haunts her into adulthood.

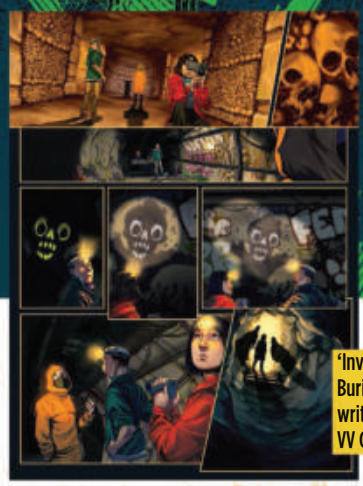
"I got to work again with David and Jack, who have brought a gnarly, creepy atmosphere to the story. I've wanted to write a Punch and Judy tale for years, inspired by British folklore, vintage horror comics like *Scream!*, and Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean's *The Tragical Comedy Or Comical Tragedy Of Mr Punch*."

"I like to stretch in different directions, which so far has included 'Cast' where a witch is accidentally summoned by a podcast, and 'The List', about a doomed prisoner who is transported to Australia in 1816," says Mike Sizemore. "'Long In The Tooth' is a tribute to the portmanteau horror features released by Amicus Productions."

Meanwhile, Duane Swierczynski and Andrea Mutti's "The Cold Pierogi" blends Polish folklore with the *Final Destination* franchise. "It was inspired by a custom I heard growing up: if an immediate family member skips Christmas Eve dinner or a non-family member shows up, then someone in the family will die the following year," says Swierczynski. "Poles take the holiday seriously!"

Tales For A HalloweeNight Vol. 10 is out now.

The Dracula File in this year's *Scream!*.



'Inverted Burial' by writer/artist VV Glass.

NOT FOR THE NERVOUS!

After the recent release of its 40th anniversary collection, *Scream!* is now returning with a 64-page one-shot, which combines old favourites "The Dracula File" and "The Thirteenth Floor" with two all-new tales.

"The Cold War setting of the original stories fascinated me and immediately got me thinking about updating it for a post-Cold War setting," says writer Alex Paknadel, who is joined on "The Dracula File" by artist Alejandro Aragon.

"I've tried to write something that spoke to our world of walls-up nationalism and dehumanisation without deviating from the premise of the original."

"I fell in love with 'The Thirteenth Floor' sometime in the '90s after finding old copies of *Scream!* at the local used bookstore," adds Torunn Grønbekk, who teams up on the misadventures of malevolent AI Max with artist Emily Schnall. "So before heading back into Maxwell Towers through my own story, I re-read all the classic stories just to get back into the vibe of things."

Centring on a '70s British rock band on their breakout US tour, Anna Readman and George Pooley's 'And His Skin Is Cold' is very much in keeping with *Scream!*'s spooky spirit. "Chaos and tragedy ensues when the cruel descent of addiction and brutal consequences of unbridled indulgence comes to a violent end one hateful evening," explains Readman.

"It's a tale of an icon's fall into darkness and dragging his nearest and closest admirers with him. With a hint of tongue in cheek, our story fits into the iconography of *Scream!* with a rock and roll twist that only the backdrop of the '70s can provide. Talent and a good voice can bring you fame, fortune and immortality, but that isn't the only way to live forever."

"'Inverted Burial' is a twist on the oldest type of horror story, although I can't say which without giving it away!" adds writer/artist VV Glass. "It's set in the Paris catacombs, which are a lot older and go a lot deeper than you'd think.

"There's a bit of DNA from Robert Macfarlane's *Underland* and a bit of the OG internet horror *Ted The Caver*, and that's just for starters!"

Scream!: 40 Years Of Terror is out 6 November.

CHILD'S PLAY

Monster Fun is celebrating the spectral season with an extra-long 48-page issue. Halloween is – in the words of Alec Worley, scripter of giant ape strip "Kid Kong" – "a signature occasion" for the title, which, like Rebellion stablemate *Scream!*, strikes an eerie balance between new material and classic characters from the original IPC comic's '70s run.

"*Monster Fun* owns this time of year more than any other comic," continues Worley. "Halloween is when we all get to play at being monsters, and *Monster Fun* offers that all year round. This year, me and 'Kid Kong' artist Karl Dixon have come up with a great story: Gran has invented a mobile ghost train that runs on the screams of its passengers, but she needs Kid to give it a test drive."

"I do like writing for the Halloween specials as I like to use the tropes and stereotypes, but hopefully subvert them a little for laughs," says Stacey Whittle, who teams up on hapless toothless shark *Gums* with artist Karl Dixon.

"This year we have two pages rather than one, which gives us a little more room to play and build a little tension. Gums is trick or treating and it slowly dawns on him that he is being haunted – or is he?"

"Martha loves Halloween as she finds monsters and spooky things inherently exciting," adds Dave Bulmer, who writes "Martha's Monster Make-Up" for Abigail Bulmer. "Usually a Martha strip is about disrupting normal situations by dropping monsters into them, but in October I always make sure to put her in a spooky setting."

Monster Fun Halloween Spooktacular 2024 is out on 2 October.

Halloween Spooktacular cover by Dan Boultwood.

GHOST STORY FOR HALLOWEEN

After collaborating with Tula Lotay on historical horror series *Somna*, Becky Cloonan has now joined forces with a host of different creators, including HamletMachine, EM Carroll, Celine Loup, Molly Mendoza and Vanessa R Del Rey to curate DSTLRY's new one-shot *Come Find Me* – in addition to writing and drawing a story herself.

"The anthology reads like six friends sitting around a fire telling each other scary stories, and everyone is bringing their own flavour," she says.

"HamletMachine's short has an element of body horror that left me flinching, while EM Carroll's pages feel like a medieval tapestry depicting an otherworldly hunt. Celine's story digs its nails into the sensual and psychological."

Describing it as "a cautionary tale that depicts horrors both real and supernatural", Cloonan's own contribution acts as a prelude to her next, as yet unannounced, solo project for DSTLRY. "It's a tangential but not a direct lead-in," she teases. "I can't speak for anyone else but every story in *Come Find Me* has the potential to launch a thousand comics."

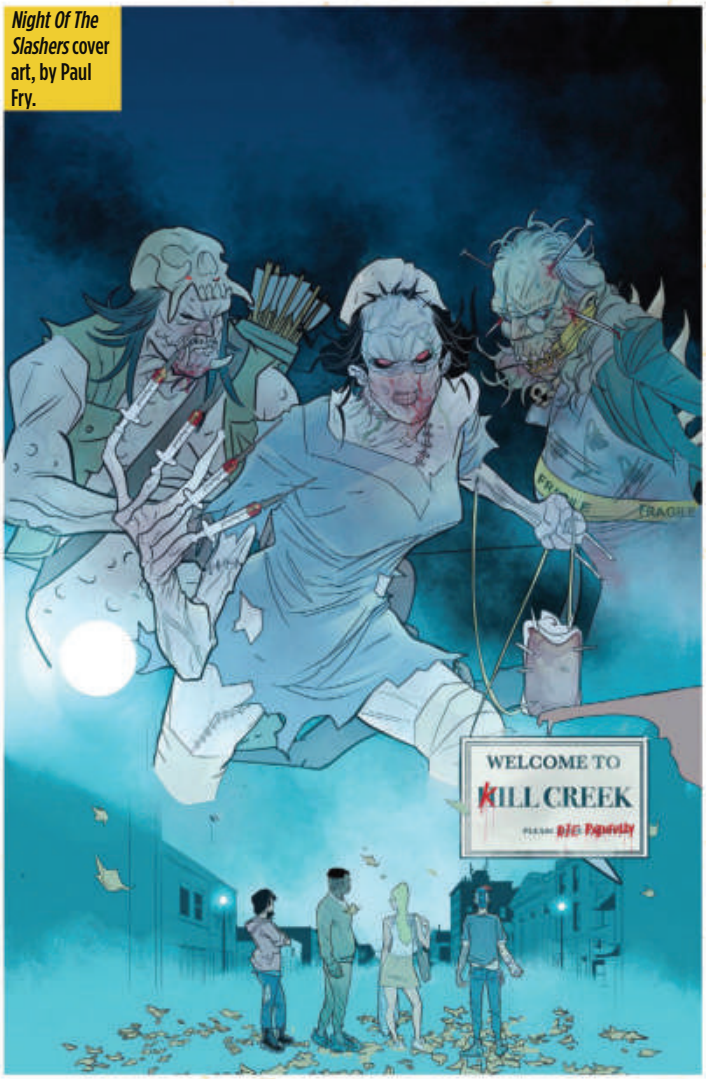
Alternative cover art by HamletMachine.

Although it has shades of MR James, the anthology's title is actually taken from a Sylvia Plath poem. "I was stuck and needed a name fast, so I turned to some of my favourite creepy poetry and eventually read 'The Snowman On The Moor'" she explains.

"The only thing more terrifying than the visuals in the poem are its implications, and the line 'Come find me' stood out as if it were underlined. Tonally it hits the enigmatic MR James note and it can be read many ways: as a taunt, a tease or a plea. It's a perfect phrase to encapsulate the breadth of stories in the book."

Despite being published during a period Americans call Fall, *Come Find Me*'s subtitle *An Autumnal Offering* is distinctively British. "It's the kind of book that I hope people curl up under a blanket to read before a crackling fire, with your favourite evening beverage," laughs Cloonan.

Come Find Me is out on 30 October.



Night Of The Slashers cover art, by Paul Fry.

A page from *Godfather Of Hell*, by Pius Bak.

FROM HELL

As it's his "go-to genre to watch and read as well as write", Cavan Scott has always considered himself a horror author. Now after previously scripting supernatural-themed series like *Tales From Vader's Castle* and *Batman: Scary Stories For A Dark Knight* – and scripting a *Batgirl* story for artist Ario Anindito for DC's upcoming horror anthology *I Know What You Did Last Crisis!* – Scott is marking Halloween with the launch of a couple of creator-owned, four-issue miniseries.

"They both come from my love of horror," he says of *Godfather Of Hell*, co-created with artist Pius Bak for Vault Comics, and the Paul Fry-drawn *Night Of The Slashers* at Magma Comix. "With *Night Of The Slashers*, the story came from a conversation with Paul where we started riffing on our favourite slasher movies, coming up with the most outlandish slashers we could," he continues. "We just needed a story which could contain them all, so *Slashers* was born, which can best be described as *The Purge* meets Freddy Krueger."

Meanwhile, *Godfather Of Hell* resembles *Lucifer* crossed with *The Sopranos*. According to Scott, "it came about from wanting to do a possession story from the point of view of one of the demons. I was circling the idea, but it didn't really solidify until I thought it would be fun to approach it as a gangster movie – *The Exorcist* as directed by Guy Ritchie," he says.

"*Godfather Of Hell* is a slick, neon-drenched infernal noir, whereas *Night Of The Slashers* is pulpy, blood-soaked fun, straight from my video nasty-loving, *Fangoria*-reading youth."

Slashers centres on Lara, who along with her fellow students is stranded in a remote town before bloody mayhem ensues with the fall of night. "She is everything you don't expect from a Final Girl, as she's snarky and nihilistic," explains Scott. "She's always ready for the worst thing to happen to her – and it does, continually, forcing her to question whether she wants to make it through to morning."

Meanwhile, *Godfather Of Hell*'s main protagonist, mob enforcer Dario Mechini, takes advantage of his untimely murder to forge a new career in the Underworld itself. "It definitely takes its cue from movies like *Drive*, with a taciturn main character who at his death realises that Hell is just another job opportunity for a debt collector who is ready to do what it takes," continues Scott. "Dario soon realises that his new boss – a literal prince of Hell – is worse than any crime lord he encountered on Earth."

Night Of The Slashers is out on 2 October and Godfather Of Hell is out on 16 October.

SPEAK OF THE DEVIL

THE DEVIL'S HOUR STRIKES TWICE AS THE GENRE-DEFYING DRAMA RETURNS WORDS: **ROBBIE DUNLOP**

Peter Capaldi as Gideon Shepherd: boo, hiss!

PRIOR TO *THE DEVIL'S HOUR* coming out in October 2022, cast and crew found it almost impossible to nail the series down. That is, without spoiling its otherworldly concepts. As Jessica Raine (Lucy Chambers) told *SFX* at the time, "I don't quite know what genre to put it in. I don't really know what to compare it to, and I think that's a good thing."

Advance promotion subsequently pigeonholed the series into a genre it didn't quite belong to. "Everyone kept saying 'It's a psychological thriller,' but it's not psychological," creator and writer Tom Moran tells *SFX*. "Actually, that's the reveal. It's not about people going mad, it's not about aspects of their psyche. It's about something much bigger than that. I would always describe it now as an existential thriller which, to me, covers the fact that it's supernatural and there are forces at play. It's essentially about a bunch of characters discovering the true nature of reality."

In this reality, everyone lives their lives over and over and over again. Put your phones away; this series requires your full concentration. "There are different loops," he explains. "There are people who can remember, people who can wake up." Season two spans several of these looping lifetimes – chiefly that of déjà vu-afflicted social worker Lucy – and acts as both a prequel and a sequel to season one. Alongside returning cast members Nikesh Patel (DI Ravi Dhillon) and Benjamin Chivers (Isaac) is Peter Capaldi as creepy serial killer Gideon Shepherd.

"We now know what Gideon's deal is," says Moran. "This character was never supposed to be born and has an ability to somehow pass between these loops into different realities. We get to tell a story across multiple dimensions," he continues.

Lucy (Jessica Raine): back from the dead?

"Season two has a slightly more thriller-like aspect to it, which is a lot of fun"

"We get to do different versions of the same character and really experiment with the question of, who are we innately? To what extent are we shaped by our experiences and what aspects of us were always in us all along? It's an amazing playground to have as a storyteller."

Having escaped from the chains that shackled him to a table for most of season one, Gideon is let loose on the world. "His mission is just really to try and prevent tragic things happening," Capaldi explains. "But the tragic things he's trying to prevent happening this season are getting bigger, so he needs more help, and as he has awoken Lucy to the facts about what déjà vu is, she feels compelled to help him. They become, not quite allies, but they become involved in this. There's a kind of ticking clock that drives the whole thing."

The overarching story sees the pair attempt to stop a horrific crime that "with the characters' knowledge having lived a million lives, they know is going to happen," Raine says. "There's a kind of countdown to this awful thing. It's tense.

"You'll see a lot more of DI Lucy in another loop, as we call them," she adds, referring to the character's appearance at the climax of season one following the original Lucy's apparent demise in a burning building. "It's a kind of double helix storyline that's going on." Capaldi adds: "Gideon influences both of those existences because, obviously, he has foreknowledge. He's able to appear in those other lives and connect them to the whole thing."

Of the series as a whole, Raine indicates that the tone is going to be very different to the more spectral first. "You wondered if there was a supernatural element to it," she says. "We totally played with that. We wanted people to be scared. Oh my god, they were *really* scared. Season two has a slightly more thriller-like aspect to it, which is a lot of fun."

The stakes are higher and the scope larger, but for Moran it all boils down to "a story of hope, a story of love. We have to take these characters to some very dark places in order to conquer that darkness, and show the message of hope and light and humanity that the story is designed to impart. So, we're putting characters through a lot of peril."

From the beginning, Moran's long-term plan for *The Devil's Hour* was that it would play out across three seasons – and the third completed filming earlier in the year. When he took the pilot to Prime Video, "I told them the last shot of the last episode: 'This is how it ends.' And I've never really strayed from that.

"That structure and that plan has always been there. Obviously, things change. The characters tell you they want to do something different so the journey changes course from time to time and you have to kind of weave it back. But the overall destination has never been under threat."

The Devil's Hour is on Prime Video from 18 October.

Laszlo (Matt Berry) and his soon-to-be new friend.

ONE FOR THE VAULTS

SHOWRUNNER PAUL SIMMS BRINGS THE BLOODY PARTY TO AN END WITH THE LAST SEASON OF WHAT WE DO IN THE SHADOWS WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**

HOW DO WE SAY GOODBYE TO arguably the most useless brood of vampires that history has ever seen? Yes, season six of FX's *What We Do In The Shadows* will be the swan song for the Staten Island roomies: Nandor the Relentless (Kayvan Novak), kinky old marrieds Laszlo Cravensworth (Matt Berry) and Nadja of Antipaxos (Natasia Demetriou), Colin Robinson (Mark Proksch) and their long-suffering familiar turned vamp, Guillermo de la Cruz (Harvey Guillén).

Although it was initially created by Jemaine Clement as a spin-off series of his 2014 mockumentary of the same name, showrunner Paul Simms (*Flight Of The Conchords*) has since been at the wheel and tells *SFX* that after lots of award wins and goodwill from critics and audiences, the team decided to follow the wisdom of "better too soon than too late" in terms of not overstaying their welcome.

"In all of our talks about this being the last season, we really decided we wanted it to be just a super-funny season, not too sentimental and not try to tie up too much mythology," Simms says of their ambitions. "We want it to be like, if someone's never seen the show before, they could tune into any episode this season and basically know what's going on."

Simms says that storywise it's very much back to everyday hijinks in the wake of Guillermo rejecting his finally achieved goal of becoming a vampire. That is until Jerry (Mike O'Brien), the gang's former fifth roommate, visits and reminds them that they were supposed to be in America to instigate some vampire conquering.

"They never really do anything that they're supposed to do. When you live 200 years, nothing seems that urgent," Simms laughs. "Jerry reminding them of what their actual mission was supposed to be – to conquer North America – does sort of drive them this season. But even by the end of episode one, Nandor is the only one who is still onboard about it. Everyone else has gone off in their own

> **"We really decided we wanted it to be just a super-funny season, not too sentimental"**

Kristen Schaal as the Guide: "Walk this way..."

Guillermo (Harvey Guillén): don't do it!

Natasia Demetriou as Nadja of Antipaxos.

Mark Proksch plays poor old Colin Robinson.

directions, because they never really learn from their mistakes. But Jerry pushing that forward with other vampires, and pushing it forward with Baron Afanas [Doug Jones] leads to a little bit of vampire political intrigue."

Simms also promises great individual pursuits for the core characters. Nandor and Nadja will take it upon themselves to help Guillermo acclimate back to a "normal" life among humans. "The thing that really made us laugh was the idea of the vampires being so worried about his ability to perform in the real world that they follow him to try to, quote unquote, help him out. I think some of our funniest stuff has been the vampires when they're out in the real world behaving the way they think regular humans do."

Back in the house, Laszlo is rekindling his goal of performing a successful reanimation from human flesh. "Laszlo wants to make a new man and Colin wants to make a friend, literally," Simms explains of their shared endeavours. "They both sort of have the same goal."

Aiding in their adventures will be, according to Simms, "a list of super-funny people" that they'd always wanted to have on the show and now had one last chance to get.

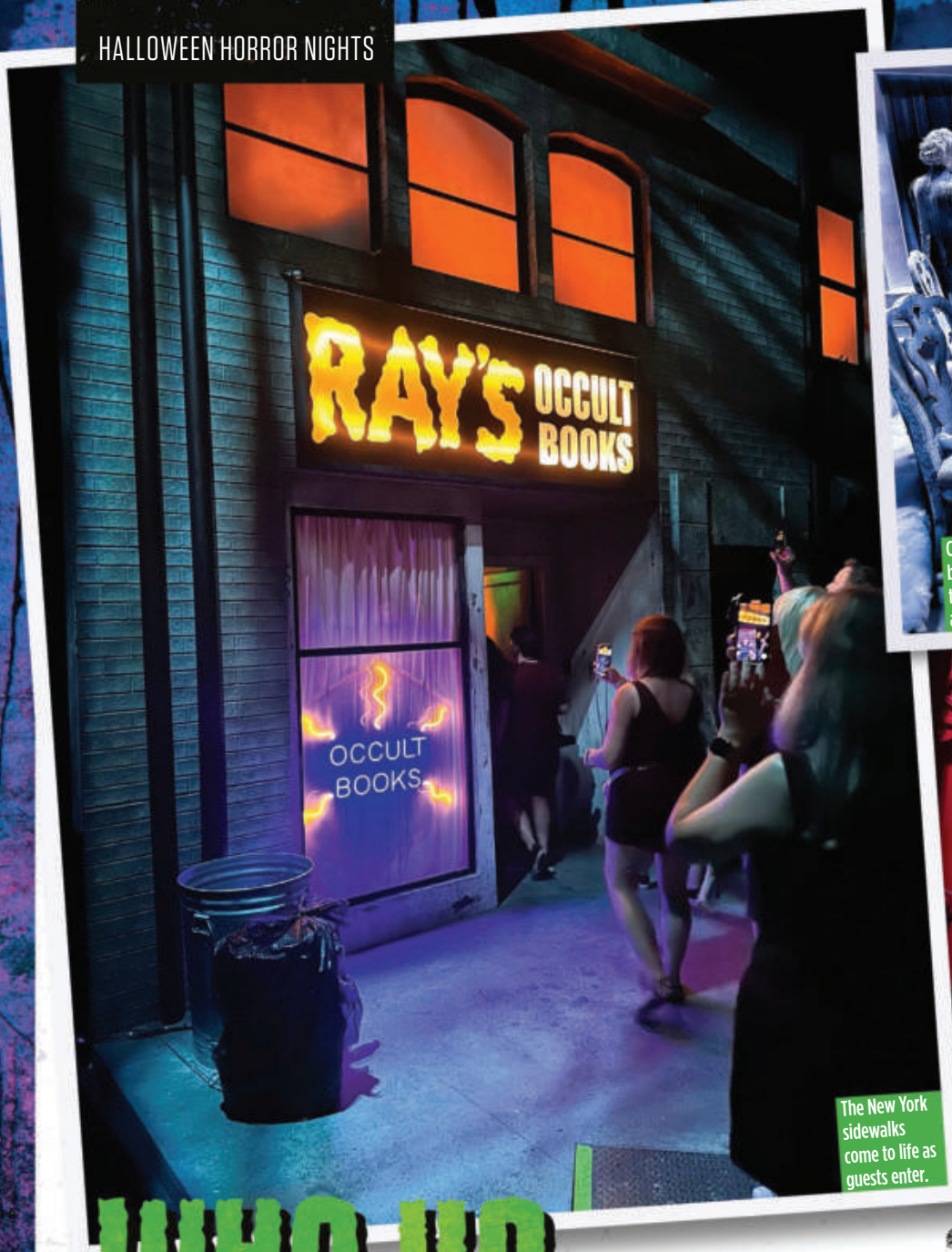
"Mike O'Brien and Tim Heidecker are two of those people," he reveals. "There's a whole bunch of other really funny ones that come up later in the season." Everything will build to a series finale that Simms says has some emotional moments, but never loses sight of the goal of being funny.

Asked how they marked the ending of the series as a team, Simms says their last day of shooting coincided with Matt Berry's 50th birthday, so they celebrated with an elaborate cake. Then, with permission from the prop department, they were invited to take home some souvenirs. "It was like the end of *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*," Simms jokes. "There's this room full of boxes labelled from all the seasons... but now I have the brain energy transfer machine and baby Colin's little cane from the nightclub act."

As the series itself was a movie spin-off, has FX or the team discussed any characters moving to other spin-off adventures in the same universe, as happened with *Wellington Paranormal*? "If someone else had a good idea, they could go ahead and do that," Simms says.

"But all of us, writers and actor-wise, we put everything we had into this. It's not like we were saving [anything] until now. It was amazing, and it's one of those things where you feel like you used it all up, and now it's time to do something completely different."

What We Do In The Shadows is on Hulu from 21 October. UK details are TBC.



The New York sidewalks come to life as guests enter.

Cold air is blasted into this scene for added chills.

Part of the Paranormal Research Center set.

WHO YA GONNA CALL?

BEHIND THE SCENES AT HALLOWEEN HORROR NIGHTS FOR *GHOSTBUSTERS: FROZEN EMPIRE*

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**

This haunted house marks a return for the *Ghostbusters* franchise to Halloween Horror Nights, having first appeared in 2019.

Creators got the script for the film as they were developing this haunted house, which appears in both Orlando and Hollywood. They then later saw a rough cut before the finished movie was released.

The *Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire* house is located in sound stage 23 in Universal Orlando, also home to *Monstruos: The Monsters Of Latin America*.

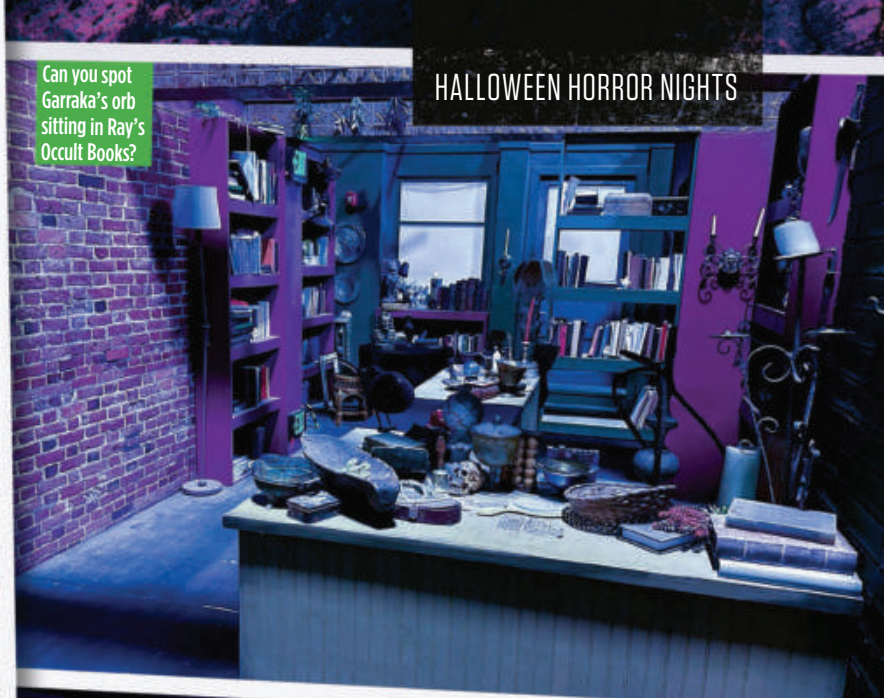
Because two houses are staged in the same space, they were unable to traditionally lower temperatures – however, the air conditioning, timed blasts of cold air and suggestion of ice makes you feel much chillier!

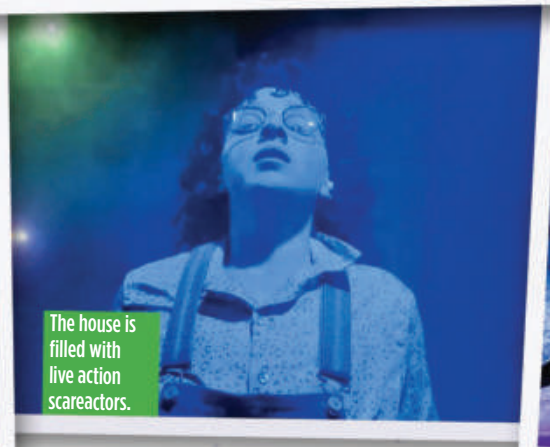
The creative team replicated film-used techniques to achieve the ice spike effects.

The codename for this house is "S'mores" because of the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man being a mascot for marshmallow s'mores. If

Slimer and the proton streams are new effects.

One of the tallest facades in HHN history – 24 feet high!


Can you spot Garraka's orb sitting in Ray's Occult Books?


The house is filled with live action scareactors.

The house is filled with Mini Pufts up to mischief!

you look hard enough, you'll find one hidden in a scene.

The bronze orb that has trapped Garraka is seen on the counter as you enter the house via Ray's Occult Books. Garraka then appears multiple times throughout the house, growing in size each time.

There are, at last count, 87 3D-printed Mini-Pufts Stay Puft Marshmallow men located throughout the house. Many appear attached to a costume, in a non-film attack scene approved by Sony.

A slimed food truck on the streets of New York City.

The lab in the Ghostbusters Paranormal Research Center is one of the most screen-accurate sets ever constructed for HHN.

This set also allowed HHN to dive into the history of *Ghostbusters*, including appearances from Terror Dogs and Vigo the Carpathian as well as ghosts from the latest movie.

In the New York sewer scene, pink slime can be seen oozing as a nod to *Ghostbusters II*.

The Library Ghost appears in various forms, one of which reuses the projection from the 2019 haunted house.

The static figure of Phoebe Spengler in the Ionic Separator is a repurposed prop that was previously a corpse on a float in the Sweet Revenge scare zone from Halloween Horror Nights 31.

The Ghostbusters Firehouse facade – which freezes over and has Slimer flying past via video effects – is one of the tallest in HHN history, standing at 24 feet.

New ways of portraying the proton pack blasts were created by the lighting and video effects team. The proton packs are 3D recreations and are screen-accurate from across the franchise.

Poor Ecto-1. Much talk was made of Universal acquiring the 1959 Cadillac via Facebook Marketplace, but it was too big for the house so only the front half of it was eventually used.

Halloween Horror Nights runs until 3 November. SFX travelled with Virgin Atlantic. Visit virginholidays.co.uk for the latest travel deals. See halloweenhorrornights.com for more information.

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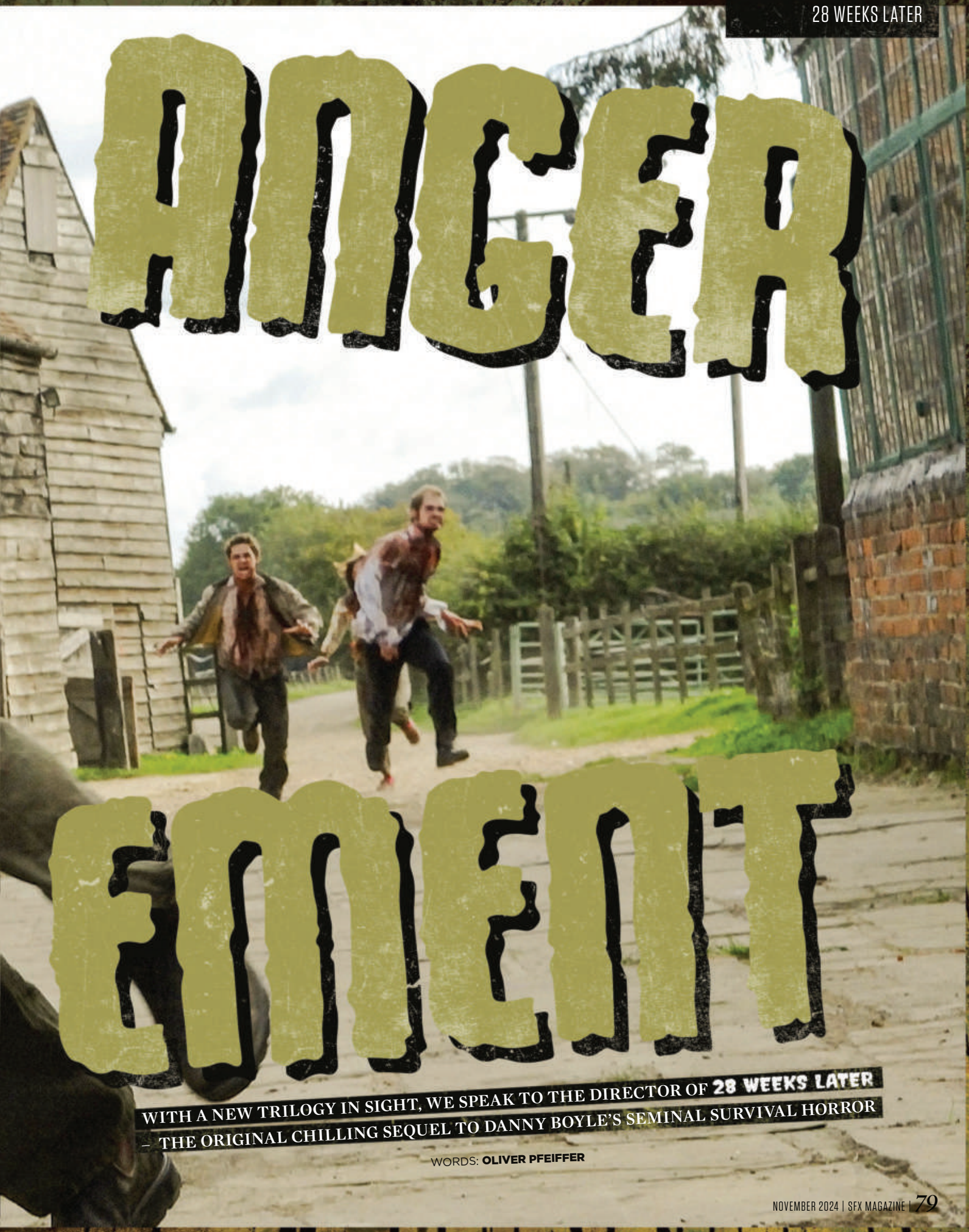


WITH A NEW TRILOGY IN SIGHT, WE SPEAK TO THE DIRECTOR OF 28 WEEKS LATER – THE ORIGINAL CHILLING SEQUEL TO DANNY BOYLE'S SEMINAL SURVIVAL HORROR

WORDS: **OLIVER PFEIFFER**

Don (Robert Carlyle) bravely flees the Infected.

OVER TWO DECADES ON, IT'S hard to describe, to anyone who wasn't around at the time, the impact Danny Boyle's 2002 contagion horror *28 Days Later* had upon its release – a film so inventively terrifying that it single-handedly revived the zombie horror genre that had laid dormant for decades.

Five years afterwards, an atmospheric sequel re-entered that horrific post-apocalyptic world with new blood and a fresh take on the enraged Infected. *28 Weeks Later* saw Spanish filmmaker Juan Carlos Fresnadillo appointed as director – personally selected by Boyle on the strength of 2001 thriller *Intacto*, his feature debut.

"I must confess that I was very doubtful when I received this flattering invitation from Danny Boyle. Because, whilst I thought *28 Days Later* was excellent, it wasn't the kind of film that I wanted to make," Fresnadillo tells *SFX*. "I love classic horror movies, but I wasn't a big fan of making them. If you want to direct a horror film, you must be immersed in its nightmare scenario, and the way that I work, I really like to go deeper and dig into the story and the characters, which affects me a lot."

MOMMIE BLEAKEST

Fortunately, despite his reservations, including being left disengaged by Rowan Joffé's original script, Fresnadillo was won over by the opportunity to put his unique stamp on the story, alongside co-writer Jesús Olmo and producer Enrique Lopez Lavigne.

"I'm one of those filmmakers that believes a movie works when you have at least one thing that will linger in the audience's mind for a long time," he continues. "We started to work with Rowan [to further develop] the idea of a family involved in this horrific scenario."

That became the genesis for the film's opening sequence, which sees the Infected attack an isolated cottage holding a group of survivors including Don (Robert Carlyle), the presumed protagonist of the film. However, in a surprising turn of events, Don gives into his survival instincts by fleeing the scene — leaving his wife Alice (Catherine McCormack) to face the full brunt of the onslaught alone.

"I found the idea of that kind of hero turning into a coward, and that kind of dilemma between survival and love such an interesting and challenging thing for the audience," says Fresnadillo. "In my case, when I was developing the script, it really convinced me that we had something great, which transcended any doubts I had."

> **"Guilt, conceptually speaking, is responsible for him turning into a monster"**

Don's fateful decision becomes the backbone of the unfolding story, which finds the father of two reunited with his children (Imogen Poots and Mackintosh Muggleton) in the safety of District One, a small area of London now secured by the US Army.

However, events take another surprising twist when Don's children flee the safe zone to go exploring and discover their distraught mother hiding out at their former home. Learning that his wife is alive and now quarantined, a guilt-ridden Don decides to visit her and beg her forgiveness, a decision which has deadly consequences.

"The guilt he feels is inside of him, and he cannot run away from that. And that guilt, conceptually speaking, is responsible for him turning into a monster, as it's the guilt that pushes him to see his wife to ask her forgiveness, resulting in this horrific poetic justice when she infects him," explains Fresnadillo.

During the confrontation, Alice, an asymptomatic carrier of the rage virus, kisses Don, resulting in his monstrous transformation into one of the Infected. The scene is curious in its approach.

"We discussed that a lot and finally decided that [her intention] had to be ambiguous; it had to be more evocative. But there's one shot in there that in some ways pushes the idea that it is kind of a revenge," the director says. "It's the shot of her looking at him as he's turning into a zombie, and she has a look in her eyes which is kind of mischievous."

After Don turns Infected, he goes on a deadly rampage, dramatically changing the character's trajectory from guilt-ridden protagonist to ravenous antagonist. At times, it may appear that Don is grappling with his new monstrous state, but although the director admits he was initially interested in exploring this conflict, any fragments of humanity felt are purely subliminal.

"It's more for you, as an audience member, to think about, but the reality and the rule that we followed at the time was, 'He is Infected, he has

Scarlet (Rose Byrne) and Doyle (Jeremy Renner).

Idris Elba as the extremely shady General Stone.

Tammy: Imogen Poots in an early role.

"Um... not today, thank you."

Actors getting blooded-up. Sticky...

no brain, he has no feelings, only rage and an irrational and killing desire to infect everyone,'" confirms Fresnadillo. "That idea that he's still human, therefore he will hesitate to attack his family... well, I originally wanted to humanise him in some ways, it was something that I pushed a lot, but because this universe is so solid, as soon as you try to change the archetype, it doesn't work.

"It's really difficult to change it from within, and I was kind of arrogant and brave at the time and said, 'No, we're going to try, and it'll be a breakthrough for infection/zombie movies'. But finally we had to follow the rules created in the origin because they were very consistent. So at the end, it was more about the family and about the kids having an emotional shock because their father is now a monster."

While large portions of *28 Days Later* were filmed using low-resolution digital video cameras to give it a distinct surveillance-style aesthetic, Fresnadillo reflected the updated scenario for the follow-up. "We wanted to have more of a natural resolution, and we thought that if we're talking about repopulation then we're talking about a new beginning, so a documentary style makes sense because that matches with the story's spirit," he says.

"The logic was to shoot in 16mm with small Aaton cameras, which produced that texture and grain of photography of a documentary. Enrique Chediak was the DP and the main camera operator, and he invented this idea: when we are close to infection, the camera becomes infected too with this kind of crazy [shaky] motion."

Contributing to this intensity was Chris Gill, who had edited Danny Boyle's original film and lent a similar adrenaline-fuelled urgency to proceedings here. "To me, he is part of the essential success of this movie because he literally created an editing style that was chaotic, infected, and full of rage like the movie," Fresnadillo continues.

DAYS TURN TO WEEKS

Contrary to some reports, Danny Boyle and Alex Garland were also a significant presence during the production of *28 Weeks Later*. The *Trainspotting* director even lent significant second-unit support, filming several beats within the opening scene. "If you think about the moment that Robert Carlyle arrived at the embankment with Jacob and Jacob's trying to get a boat – all of that sequence with him fighting against the Infected people and against Jacob, who then turns into another Infected – all of that was shot by Danny," reveals Fresnadillo.

"He was on second unit for three days, and he really helped us. He was really involved in specific beats in the movie too – he even came up with the idea of using the helicopter to chop the heads off the Infected, which was such a fun moment in the movie."

28 Weeks Later was purposefully left open-ended; a scene where a group of the Infected reach Paris was added at the last minute, due to a push for a more action-driven denouement. However, initially, the film ended at the stadium scene where the kids reencounter helicopter pilot Flynn (Harold Perrineau). "Funnily enough, the new [sequel] is following the first film, but at the time, they wanted the chance to keep going, so that's why we added that coda in Paris."

Currently in production, *28 Years Later* looks set to ignite a new trilogy, with the return of Boyle in the director's chair, original writer Alex Garland, and star Cillian Murphy. "I'm super excited about Danny and Alex coming back again into this franchise, because I got the impression that something was pending in this universe," Fresnadillo says.

"I think it's a great gift to every fan of this franchise that they are teaming up to refresh and restart this universe. And the second one, directed by Nia DaCosta, continues the idea of each instalment having fresh blood."

28 Weeks Later is on Disney+.

Chew on that! Don gets a little too intimate.

REVISITING 28 WEEKS LATER

The director on an alternative approach

"Years after I made *28 Weeks Later*, I remember having a conversation with my producer Enrique Lopez Lavigne, where we discussed this alternative idea that I wished I would've had while making the movie," says Juan Carlos Fresnadillo.

"What if we stretch out that first family concept, where, instead of the father turning Infected, he decides not to visit his wife, and instead she infects the population, and he has to run away from District One with his kids? So the second part of this movie would see Don protecting them, doing what he didn't do with his wife at the beginning. Which makes sense because, in a way, he's redeeming himself."

The ending would see Don and the kids return to the cottage setting to seek refuge, with Alice making her way there, too. "The whole family is reunited, and it seems like the perfect happy ending. However, she has the virus, kisses him, and he becomes infected, and you finish with the two kids running, running...!

"To me, the iconic image of *28 Weeks Later* is Don running at the beginning with the Infected getting closer and closer. So having the same image with the kids mirroring that in the end, with their father chasing them, maybe it would have been a perfect ending."

PICTURES © 20TH CENTURY FOX

Brought THE SFX AUTHOR INTERVIEW To Book

ALAN MOORE

The legendary writer on the first volume of his Long London quintet

Words by Will Salmon /// Portrait by Joe Brown

TWO YEARS AGO ALAN MOORE PUBLISHED *Illuminations*, a terrific collection of short stories. It wasn't his first literary work, but it seemed to mark the start of a new phase in Moore's career now that he's left the world of comics behind for good. When *SFX* interviewed him about it, he mentioned that he was working on an ambitious sequence of novels to be titled the Long London quintet. Two years on, the first instalment is here, and it's every bit as delightful, hilarious and bizarre as you might hope.

The Great When takes place in 1949 in the bombed-out ruins of the capital, a city still pulling itself together after the war. The book blends fact and fantasy and makes use of a cast of real life London notables, as well as the fictional – and incredibly-named – hero, Dennis Knuckleyard.

"When I was trying to think of what I might like to do in literary terms, I realised that I've still got a lot of interest in London and particularly in the marginal characters who don't get talked about in the official histories of the place," says Moore. "People like [flamboyant racing tipster] Prince Monolulu or [self-proclaimed "King of the Bohemians"] Iron Foot Jack. They became characters in search of a plot, if you like, so I needed a story that would encompass all of these people."

That plot is a deliberately perplexing caper that finds Dennis on the run in two distinct versions of the city: a vividly realised rendering of the material London, and the Great When of the title – another plane of existence that Moore writes about in extraordinary passages of luminous, hallucinatory prose.

THE CITY & THE CITY

"Reading through my favourite London books, I came inevitably to Arthur Machen and his short story 'N', which is based upon an imaginary book that somehow proves the existence of another London – this more blazing and significant city that somehow exists behind our world," Moore explains.

"I thought, well, that fits nicely into my own thoughts about the fact that the London that exists today is not the London that people think of when they hear the word 'London'. They conjure an imaginary city that's made up of things from history and from fiction. I wanted to come up with an essential London that somehow encompassed all of that."

Moore decided that 1949 was the ideal year to start his series, which will move forward in time with each volume. "I want to look at London's identity and how it's changed over the 20th century, and what that means about our current century," he says. "1949 was a great place to start because I could see how, in the space of five books, I could take it from there to 1999 and show what's happened to London in that time. The second book is set in 1959, the third one is 1969, the fourth is 1979 and then we get a 20-year gap – which will be explained. Then we're in 1999, which is where the epilogues to the books all take place."

Of course, Moore himself famously lives in Northampton, and he likens *The Great When* to "a remote viewing" of the capital. "I haven't visited in some years now, mainly because my chief relationship with London was through my late friend and mentor, Steve Moore," he says.

"I met him at the age of about 15 and I was going down more and more regularly as years went on to visit Steve. Since he died in 2014 I've had less reason to go there, but as the physical London retreats, for me, the imagined London becomes bigger and more present."

EXTRAORDINARY JOE

With *The Great When* materialising ominously in book shops, Moore's attention is now fixed firmly on the second volume, *I Hear A New World*. It's titled after the bizarre and brilliant album of the same name by visionary record producer – and later murderer – Joe Meek, who will also feature in the novel. "He's an absolute gift as a character. Once I got that Gloucester accent down pat, then I started to have an awful lot of fun writing Joe."

Dennis will also be back and in trouble once again. "In the scene I'm writing at the moment, Dennis is in Hell – it's a Hell in London, though." Moore also promises – or perhaps *threatens* – "the most intentionally bad and horrible poem that I have ever, will ever, commit to paper."

Before then, however, is *The Moon And Serpent Bumper Book of Magic* – also out this month. This long-awaited graphic grimoire is the culmination of years of work between Alan and the aforementioned Steve Moore, plus artists Kevin O'Neill, John Coulthart, Steve Parkhouse, Rick Veitch and Ben Wickey.

"It's a book that means an awful lot to me," says Moore. "I hope that we've been as lucid as it is possible to be. We've tried to make a book that people, if they were told 'There's this big book of magic', whether they're nine or 90, they'd perhaps somehow imagined it to be this book."

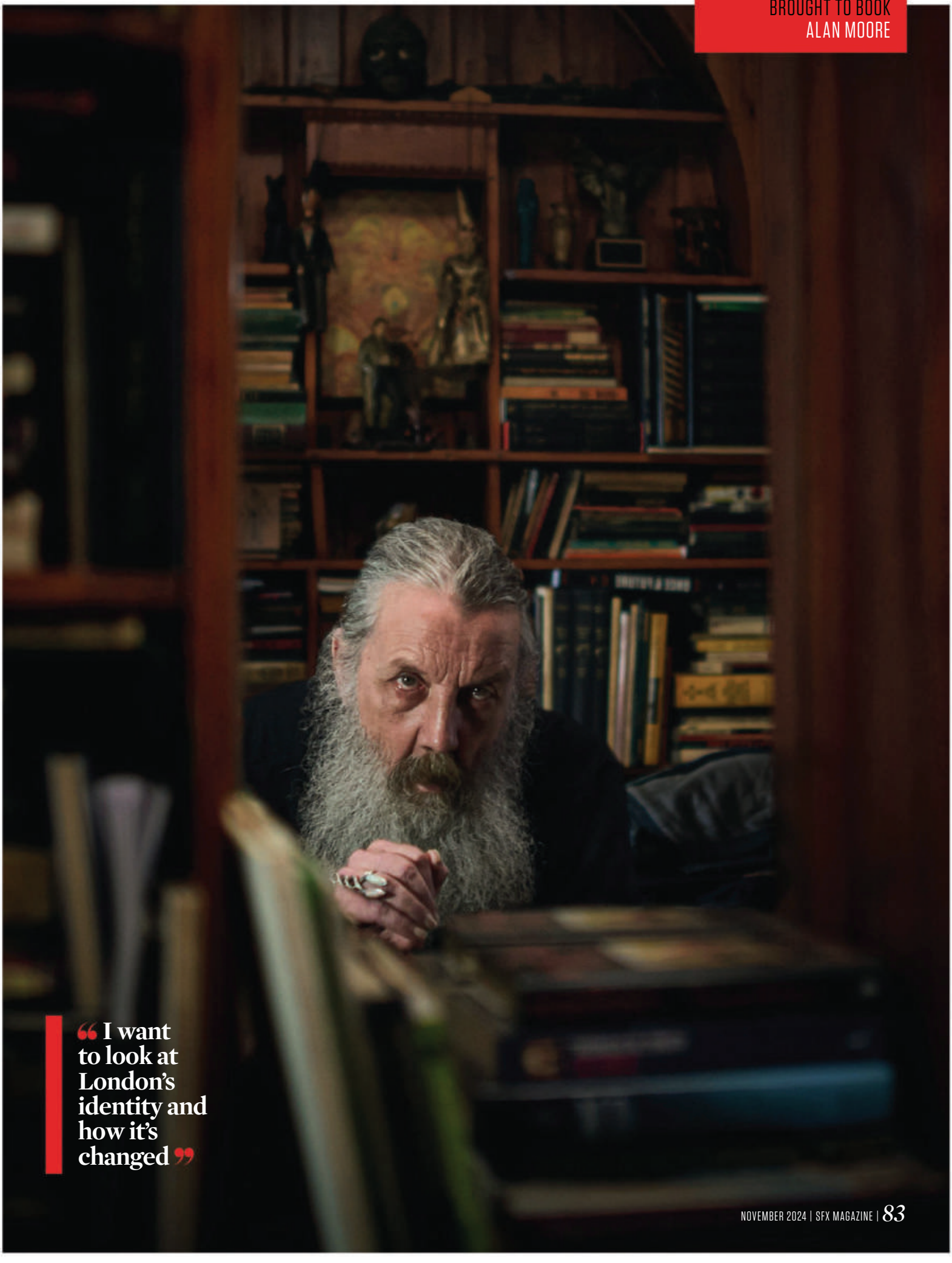
The Great When is out now, published by Bloomsbury.

BIODATA

From
Northampton

Greatest Hits
Moore is widely regarded as the world's greatest comic book writer thanks to classics like *From Hell*, *The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and *Watchmen*. He's now focused on literature, penning *Jerusalem* in 2016 and the 2022 collection *Illuminations*.

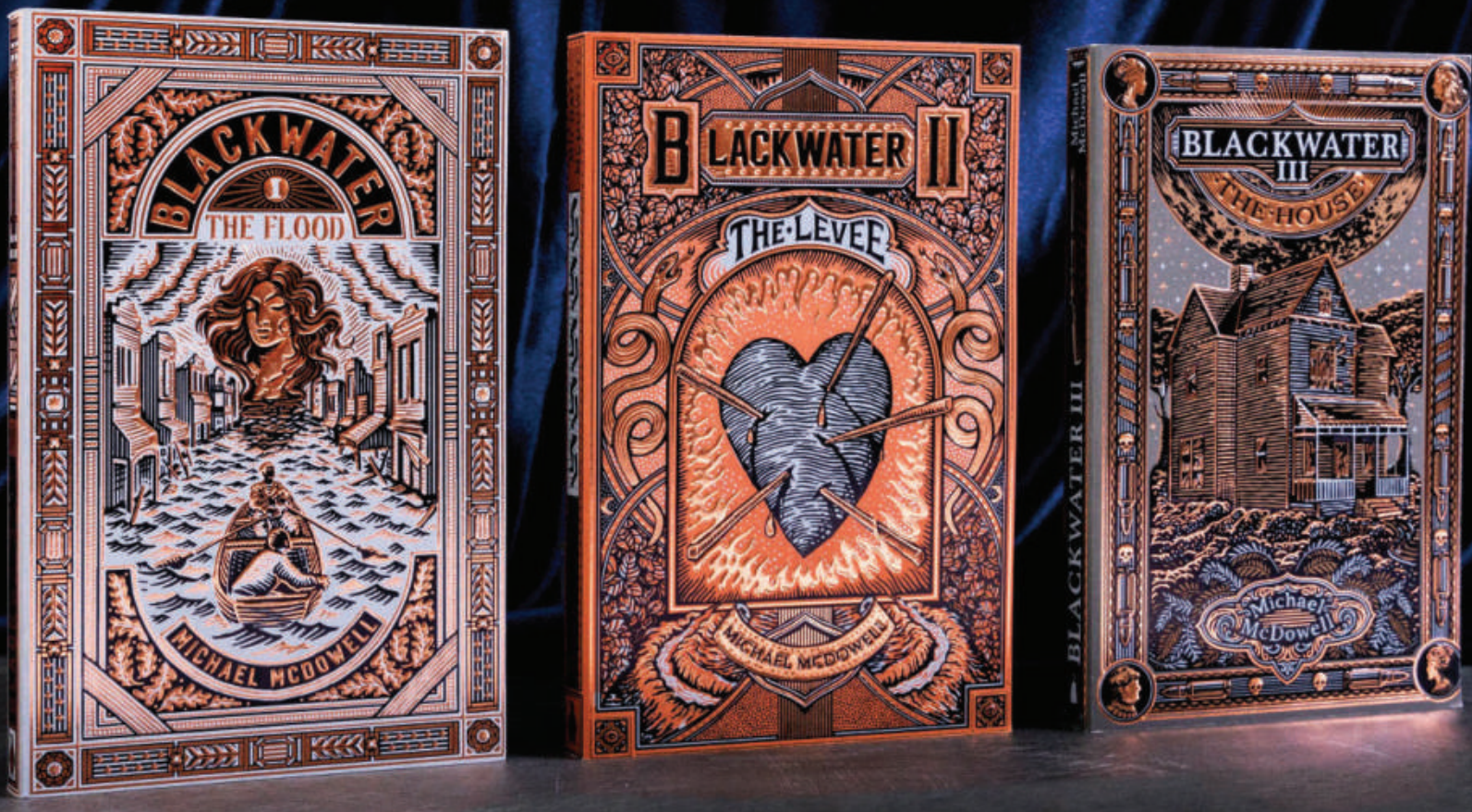
Random Fact
Moore literally dreamed up the name Dennis Knuckleyard: "I just sat up in bed laughing, because I'd never heard such a ridiculous name."



> “I want to look at London’s identity and how it’s changed”

FROM THE MIND OF BEETLEJUICE SCREENWRITER,
MICHAEL McDOWELL, COMES THE
MILLION-COPY-BESTSELLING SENSATION:

THE BLACKWATER SAGA



'RIVETING, TERRIFYING'
STEPHEN KING

Available from
WATERSTONES

NOVEMBER 2024

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edited by Ian Berriman

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JOKER: FOLIE À DEUX

Mad Love

★★★½☆

RELEASED 4 OCTOBER

12A |138 minutes

Director **Todd Phillips**

Cast **Joaquin Phoenix, Lady Gaga, Brendan Gleeson, Catherine Keener**

It's been five long years since Joaquin Phoenix's take on Batman's nemesis danced onto our screens, winning armfuls of awards and making the GDP of a small country at the box office.

But for the titular Joker, aka Arthur Fleck, only two years have passed, spent in Arkham Asylum awaiting what the media has labelled "The Trial Of The Century" – the first to be broadcast on television, with district attorney Harvey Dent calling for the death penalty.

The first film acted as an origin story, seeing the mild-mannered, mentally ill aspiring comedian become the villainous Joker, killing six people along the way, while this film is fascinatingly inert, only covering the fallout of the previous one.

Those who come in expecting the next chapter of the Joker terrorising Gotham will be sorely disappointed, instead finding themselves watching a courtroom drama/musical in which characters endlessly debate whether or not Arthur Fleck is mentally well enough to be prosecuted. That's not to say the film is bad per se, and Phoenix's performance surpasses that of the original, but it has such limited forward propulsion it's more of an extended epilogue.

> **"There remains something fascinating about Joker's return"**

The most significant addition is Lady Gaga's Harley Quinn, who Arthur encounters in Arkham's therapeutic choir. The two fall instantly in love with one another, and the musical elements come to the fore, with a number of duets both in the halls of Arkham and in the couple's fantasies, where they imagine themselves in old Hollywood musicals, or as stars of a Sonny and Cher-style show.

Gaga has said "I wouldn't necessarily say that this is actually a musical", but make no mistake, she is incorrect: the film has over a dozen songs, ranging from "Get Happy" to "When The Saints Go Marching In". While most of them have their charms, and a duet of *Sweet Charity*'s "If My Friends Could See Me Now" is the film's highlight, some become a little repetitive, and by the umpteenth return to their dark variety show the novelty of seeing Gaga cosplay Cher has worn off.

Unfortunately, outside of showing off her considerable singing talents, there is very little else for Gaga to do; her characterisation of Quinn is much thinner and less intriguing than the character's previous incarnations across comics, films and animation.

Despite all that, there remains something fascinating about the Joker's return. Phoenix carves out some phenomenally dark moments of humour while never keeping you too far from the profound pain and confusion at the heart of his character. While this *Folie à Deux* is no masterpiece, watching its star still feels like observing a master at work.

Leila Latif

i Phillips and Phoenix originally discussed making a Broadway show, after the actor dreamed about playing Fleck on stage.

THE WILD ROBOT

★★★½☆

RELEASED 18 OCTOBER

U | 102 minutes

Director **Chris Sanders**

Cast **Lupita Nyong'o, Pedro Pascal, Kit Connor, Stephanie Hsu**

Chris Sanders previously co-directed two exceptional animated films: *Lilo & Stitch* and *How To Train Your Dragon*. Now he's directed *The Wild Robot*, which is bold, spectacular and very enjoyable, but whose story is harder to buy into than its predecessors.

A robot that's designed to serve humans accidentally falls onto a verdant island, with no people but abundant wildlife. The animals violently reject the newcomer, but Roz, as the robot comes to call itself, transforms its own programming when it "adopts" and raises a gosling.

The Wild Robot looks terrific, mixing CG with painterly textures in the manner of recent DreamWorks animated movies (and without ever feeling the need to include those films' anime-style flashy effects). It has sublime images, especially involving flight, and the parenting story between Roz and the bird will have audiences blubbing.

More awkward are the film's attempts to show the cruelties of nature in a light-hearted family animation, with gallows humour one moment, mawkishness the next. Disney's *Bambi* did it better 80 years ago.

When we learn more about the world the story's set in, the quietly shocking revelation unfolds with a lyrical, wordless power that the rest of the film often lacks. But *The Wild Robot* is still expertly told, packing an epic-feeling story into a modest running time. **Andrew Osmond**

"I bet Nick Setchfield will really enjoy this scene."

SALEM'S LOT

Kingdom Come

★★★½☆

RELEASED 11 OCTOBER

15 | 113 minutes

Director **Gary Dauberman**

Cast **Lewis Pullman, Makenzie Leigh, Bill Camp, Alfre Woodard**

Missing its original release date by two whole years – excuses include everything from the pandemic to high-level studio restructuring – this third version of Stephen King's classic novel about a writer returning to his home town, only to discover a vampiric infestation, finally emerges from the corporate crypt.

Screenwriter/director Gary Dauberman has a proven affinity for King's work, having co-written the *It* movies, and he clearly comes to the source material as a fan. Conjuring a low-key, low-tech retro vibe, the film preserves the mid-'70s ambience of the book without ever feeling like disco era cosplay.

> **"It preserves the mid-'70s ambience of the book"**

There's an authentically haunted quality to Lewis Pullman's turn as homecoming novelist Ben Mears, another of King's obvious proxies, even if that everyman sincerity clashes with an enjoyably ripe, Universal Horror performance by Pilou Asbæk as Straker, luxuriously moustached servant of the vampiric Barlow. That mix of tones is evident throughout, with some of the kid-focused scenes bringing more than a touch of RL Stine's *Goosebumps*.

Tobe Hooper's much-loved 1979 miniseries casts a heavy shadow. The revenant-at-the-window scene is too familiar, too *anticipated* to work as a jump-scare now. Barlow is verminously terrifying but essentially an upgrade of Hooper's vision.

Dauberman excels when he aims for his own iconic moments; a simply but brilliantly staged sequence of a child's abduction among silhouetted trees deserves to be every bit as well-remembered.

Nick Setchfield

i Stephen King originally planned to call his novel *Second Coming*, but his wife pointed out that "sounded like a sex manual".

© LUDO ROBERTS

TIMESTALKER

★★★½☆

RELEASED 11 OCTOBER

TBC | 89 minutes

Director **Alice Lowe**

Cast **Alice Lowe, Jacob Anderson, Nick Frost, Aneurin Barnard**

Not that she's ever acknowledged as such by BAFTA, but Alice Lowe really is one of our most treasured filmmakers. As the co-writer of Ben Wheatley's serial killers-on-holiday comedy *Sightseers*, and also the writer/director of 2016 splatterfest *Prevenge* and now *Timestalkers*, she's one of British cinema's most eccentric voices, but one who's work is probably a bit too leftfield for mainstream folk.

On paper, *Timestalker* looks like her most accessible picture yet, telling the story of a one-sided love affair through the centuries, as Lowe's character – or at least versions of the same character – attempts to hook up with Aneurin Barnard's smouldering bad boy. At various points in the film's narrative he's a 17th-century heretic, a Dick Turpin-like highwayman and a narcissistic New Romantic pop star.

Lowe's setting of the movie in multiple time periods – 1688, 1793, 1847 and 1980 – allows her to play out various different forms of the meet-cute, and even if the budget can't quite stretch to the full cinematic treatment, it's still a spirited refresh of some of some of your standard romcom's' most overused tropes.

Timestalker still won't be for everyone, but if you're looking for that sweet spot between Richard Curtis and Derek Jarman, then look no further. **Steve O'Brien**

Richard Osman transforms into his final form.

TRANSFORMERS ONE

Hooray, no Michael Bay!

★★★½☆

RELEASED 11 OCTOBER

PG | 104 minutes

Director **John Cooley**

Cast **Chris Hemsworth, Brian Tyree Henry, Scarlett Johansson, Keegan-Michael Key**

This CG animation reboots *Transformers*, providing an origin story for the shapeshifting robots, so you don't need to know or remember any other versions. Indeed, you may enjoy it more if you don't know the property well, in which case the story will throw up some engaging twists. It's also well-paced, coherent, has decent character arcs and is likeable.

That's quite an achievement given that the film is set entirely on Cybertron, and the characters' facial expressions are mostly functional. Thankfully their voices are much more human, starting with Chris Hemsworth as an underdog mining bot called (initially, at least) Orion Pax. He finds a map to a power source on his planet's mysterious surface that could transform his society.

Orion's journey pulls along his miner workmate D-16 (Bryan Tryee Henry), his amusingly seething ex-boss Elita (Scarlett Johansson), and a certain sweet yellow-coloured doofus (Keegan-Michael Key). The film never loses sight of these characters as their journey escalates into smashing skyscrapers and world revolution.

Despite occasional interesting visuals, the film's never visionary, but it takes what could have been IP spin-off dross and makes a very decent nuts and bolts adventure.

Andrew Osmond

i Director Josh Cooley took inspiration from Biblical epics like *Ben-Hur* for the relationship between Orion Pax and D-16.

BEETLEJUICE BEETLEJUICE

Dead Man Walking

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

12A | 105 minutes

Director **Tim Burton**

Cast **Michael Keaton, Winona Ryder, Jenna Ortega, Catherine O'Hara**

Joker 3: Dead And Loving It, coming in 2027.

Thirty-six years on from the original *Beetlejuice*, Tim Burton brings (most of) the band back together for a spirited sequel that gives both fans and neophytes a ghoulish slab of macabre entertainment.

Set in the same Connecticut town as its 1988 predecessor (and the same grim afterlife to which its newly deceased protagonists descended), it's a riot of outlandish jokes, grisly effects and wildly competing plot threads. As muddled and messy as it sometimes is, though, it always possesses brio: a quality Burton's cinematic offerings over the last decade have been conspicuously and depressingly short of.

All grown-up with a teenaged daughter of her own, Lydia Deetz (Winona Ryder) is now a "psychic mediator" who hosts a ghostly TV show. When her dad gets beheaded by a shark, however, she is summoned back to Winter River with stroppy Astrid (Jenna Ortega) in tow for an awkward family reunion. It's not long before demented demon Beetlejuice (Michael Keaton) gatecrashes the party, still hankering for Lydia to be his corpse bride. Yet the roguish bio-exorcist has more pressing concerns, not least a vengeful ex (Monica Bellucci), still sore over that time he chopped her up into little pieces.

The scene where Bellucci's Delores reassembles herself with the help of a staple gun is an early highlight, while a later episode featuring Beetlejuice in baby form is as jaw-dropping as it is repulsive. Yet Burton's scattershot approach has its casualties too, Willem Dafoe's role as a dead actor prominent among them. If you were also hoping that Alec Baldwin and Geena Davis might put in an appearance, well... no.

For the most part, however, *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice* does all you could reasonably ask of it – except, perhaps, provide a compelling justification for its own belated existence. **Neil Smith**

i An extended homage to the work of horror director Mario Bava sees a black-and-white Keaton speak subtitled Italian.

DRAGONKEEPER

★★½☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

PG | 99 minutes

Directors **Salvador Simó, Li Jianping**

Cast **Mayalinee Griffiths, Bill Nighy, Anthony Howell, Bill Bailey**

This CG-animated fantasy is set and was animated in China, is a Spanish co-production, and has a story based on an Australian book by Carole Wilkinson (not to be confused with the novel by Robin Hobb). You might expect the results to be messy, but instead they're just boring.

In a fantasy past, the last dragons are imprisoned and exploited by China's rulers, but a few people – the dragonkeepers – still have a rapport with them. Ping is a little peasant girl toiling in a fortress, who's soon revealed to be one of their number. She escapes with the aged male dragon Danzi, and together they try to save a dragon egg that's being taken to the Emperor.

The early scenes in the snow-draped fortress look exceptional, placing us in Ping's world very pleasingly. Unfortunately, the pacing's plodding from the start, making a largely familiar story feel glacial. Danzi is a disappointingly mediocre dragon, with Bill Nighy's paternal voice only flattening him further in a generally half-hearted dub. And more could have been done with a spoilt boy prince, who might have been a decent foil for Ping.

The film livens up slightly in the more action-orientated second half, but it's no match for Disney's *Raya And The Last Dragon*.

Andrew Osmond

SPEAK NO EVIL

★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

15 | 110 minutes

Director **James Watkins**

Cast **James McAvoy, Mackenzie Davis, Aisling Franciosi, Scott McNairy**

"Harrowing", with "a climax of *The Mist*-level bleakness"; that was how *SFX* described Christian Tafdrup's Danish horror. Now, only two years later, an English-language remake is in cinemas, raising the question "Why bother?"

Well, James Watkins (*Eden Lake*, *The Woman In Black*) has essentially produced a cover version played with entirely new instruments. Familiar moments are given new context, stressing different emotions, while the third act takes a surprising turn that's entirely new, amounting to a riff on a Sam Peckinpah shootout. For some, that will sound like a misunderstanding of the original film's intentions – though that is a misunderstanding of Watkins's reasons for his rendition.

There's still tension as a family (American) heads to the countryside (English) to visit a family they barely know, portrayed by James McAvoy (on ferocious, *Split*-like form) and Aisling Franciosi (brilliant as the manipulative wife), and discovers dark secrets.

But this is a Blumhouse movie; the bleakness is turned down, the tension ratcheted up, and a surprising amount of humour injected. So rather than leaving the cinema despairing for mankind, you will instead walk out having had a thrilling time all round – and *that's* why they bothered.

Jack Shepherd

THE CROW

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

18 | 111 minutes

Director **Rupert Sanders**

Cast Bill Skarsgård, FKA Twigs, Danny Huston, Laura Birn

"If I'm ever hard to love, just try to love me harder."

Alex Proyas's original 1994 version of *The Crow* is so beloved among goths of a certain age that it seems almost sacrilegious for anyone to make another one. But Rupert Sanders's reboot isn't for '90s kids anyway.

There's no nostalgia here, no cheeky winks or needle drops. Instead, it's a dark supernatural revenger that believes so fervently in its central love story that it's hard not to get a little swept away by it.

This time around, Eric and Shelly are two messed-up kids who meet in rehab and end up running afoul of a creepy crime lord. This bit, you know: they both get murdered, but Eric (plus a crow pal) comes back to chop up the bad guys with a katana to avenge his sweetheart. And yes, he does put on that iconic smeared black makeup (although here, it's tattoo ink).

The script does make a stab at establishing a mythology, and its villain is genuinely frightening, but what makes this film feel unique is its big, stupid, vulnerable heart. Its answer to every problem is love: if only its characters can love more, love harder, in the most desperately teenage sense, then nothing else matters.

It's messy, sure, but it's sincere. So while it won't be for everyone, the people who love this film will love it *hard*.

Sarah Dobbs

AFRAID

★½☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

15 | 84 minutes

Director **Chris Weitz**

Cast **John Cho, Katherine Waterston, Havana Rose Liu, Keith Carradine**

This tepid techno-thriller slipped in and out of cinemas rather sheepishly last month. And that's not really surprising – *AfrAId* (yes, that really is how they're styling the title) feels painfully dated, and that's despite a script that throws in every hot button online parental fear from doxxing to revenge porn and swatting.

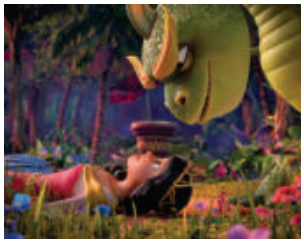
Curtis (*Star Trek*'s John Cho) is a marketeer given the assignment of trialling AIA – a "next generation digital assistant" – in his home. It soon becomes clear that while AIA is good at reading to the kids and consoling grieving mother Meredith (Katherine Waterston), it's also quick to break boundaries when it comes to inveigling its way into the heart of the family.

There are a few interesting ideas in writer/director Chris Weitz's script, but *AfrAId* (no, typing that never stops being annoying) is a muddled and fright-free affair.

At its heart this is a thriller about the ease with which lives can be ruined by tech run rampant, but because it's a Blumhouse flick it also throws in some pointless jump scares and a rubbish home-invasion subplot involving masked vigilantes that feels like it's been pasted in from a different movie entirely.

Too bland to be funny-bad, *AfrAId* is simply banal. Think of it as *Wack Mirror*.

Will Salmon



REBELLIOUS

★★★☆☆

RELEASED 25 OCTOBER

PG | 94 minutes

Director **Alex Tsitsilin**

Cast **Alyson Leigh Rosenfeld, Dan Edwards, Vanessa Johansson, Pete Zarustica**

➲ *Rebellious* has fun mocking the fairy tale tropes of our childhoods, while also winking cheekily in Disney's direction by throwing in a group of princesses who look suspiciously similar to others we know (but not, hopefully, enough to get lawyers excited).

This audaciousness is rather endearing: *Rebellious* is surprisingly confident despite a lower budget than, for example, any Disney or Pixar production. This is a film that knows it can't compete with giants, but is still willing to fight.

We open with a princess, Mina (Alyson Leigh Rosenfeld), accepting a marriage proposal from handsome architect Ronan (Dan Edwards), despite the fact that he's a commoner.

When a dragon suddenly descends on their wedding party and kidnaps his bride, Ronan must beat an assortment of princes to bring her home – but Mina herself is on the warpath. The dragon works for a sorcerer, and she's having *none* of his nonsense, thank you very much! Mina soon sets about freeing herself and the other women he's captured.

Both leads are fun, the storytelling is witty and the magical shenanigans are jolly enough to keep youngsters entertained. It's just a shame that the supporting voice cast are a bit ropey. These rough edges, however, are offset by the film's charming silliness. **Jayne Nelson**

"Say hello to my little friend. And my gun."

HELLBOY: THE CROOKED MAN

The Big Red One

★★½☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

15 | 99 minutes

Directors **Brian Taylor**

Cast **Jack Kesy, Adeline Rudolph, Joseph Marcell, Leah McNamara**

➲ Okay, let's try this again... *Hellboy* first made it to the big screen in 2004 with Guillermo del Toro's take on Mike Mignola's half-demon superhero. It found a strong fanbase, but attempts to turn it into a trilogy floundered. The franchise was rebooted in 2019 – and bombed. Now, five years later, Hellboy returns with a *second* reboot, a new leading man and a visibly reduced budget.

The Crooked Man wastes little time on backstory. It's 1959. Hellboy (Jack Kesy) and BPRD agent Bobbie Jo Song (Adeline Rudolph) find themselves stranded in a small Appalachian town beset by witches. Meanwhile ex-soldier Tom (Jefferson White) is trapped in a Faustian bargain with the titular Crooked Man – and only Big Red can help.

"Hellboy in a folk horror thriller co-written by Mike Mignola" is a solid pitch, and visually the film recalls *The Witch* with its muted colours and backwoods setting. Unfortunately, it's not very good – jarringly edited, lacking in tension and weirdly uninterested in Hellboy himself.

That's true to the comics, where the character tends to get embroiled in other people's stories, but it's an odd choice for the first instalment of a potential series and means Kesy – solid in the role; more accurate to the comic character but less charming than Ron Perlman – isn't given enough to do.

But the film's biggest problem is Brian Taylor's direction, which somehow renders a simple story confusing. *The Crooked Man* isn't a disaster, but perhaps a faithful Hellboy adaptation really needs a TV series rather than odd one-offs like this. **Will Salmon**

i Hellboy actor Jack Kesy was so exhausted by the time he finally wrapped on the film that he burst into tears.

MY OLD ASS

★★★★½

RELEASED OUT NOW!

15 | 89 minutes

Director **Megan Park**

Cast **Maisy Stella, Aubrey Plaza, Percy Hynes White, Kerrice Brooks**

➲ A week before heading off to college and leaving her idyllic lakeside life behind, 18-year-old Elliott (Maisy Stella) goes camping with her friends. After drinking magic-mushroom tea, she imagines being visited by her 39-year-old self, played by Aubrey Plaza. Much witty banter ensues before Future Elliott imparts an important piece of advice: stay away from a man named Chad.

But was it really a hallucination? Once the 'shroom-trip is over, Elliott does indeed bump into a man named Chad (Percy Hynes White). What's more, the chemistry between them is off the charts. When Elliott discovers she can actually *text* Future Elliott to ask what's going on, a mystery unfolds.

The time travel elements of this aren't really the point, although there are a few intriguing hints as to what life in the future will be like. Instead this is 100% romcom; a love story Richard Curtis would have loved to get his mitts on.

Stella is fantastic as Elliott, struggling to reconcile her attraction to Chad with the fact she always thought she was gay. Her relationship with her family is also a moving, bittersweet subplot. And Hynes White gives a perfect performance, laconically reacting to Elliott's weirdness with droll, laid-back humour. Together they're dynamite – just like this film. **Jayne Nelson**

NEVER LET GO

The ties that bind

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

15 | 101 minutes

Director **Alexandre Aja**

Cast **Halle Berry, Percy Daggs IV, Anthony B Jenkins, Matthew Kevin Anderson**

Survival horror takes on a Biblical solemnity in Alexandre Aja's latest, whose bleak story of a mother and her sons evading a shapeshifting evil comes with portentous allusions to the Garden of Eden, Cain and Abel, and Eve's forbidden fruit.

A glammed-down Halle Berry gives a fierily committed performance in a thriller reminiscent of both Nicolas Cage's recent *Arcadian* and the *A Quiet Place* series. When it's incumbent upon her co-stars to do the dramatic heavy lifting, however, one's inclined to start picking holes in a yarn that doesn't so much require a suspension of disbelief as implacably demand it.

In a dilapidated shack in the middle of the woods, safety from a malevolence "that can wear many, many skins" hangs on being literally tethered to the building's foundations whenever one forays into the forest. As supplies dwindle, however, the artistically-minded Nolan (Percy Daggs IV) begins to question his mom's inflexible beliefs and the sway which they hold over his impressionable sibling Samuel (Anthony B Jenkins).

Genre fans may intuit the direction things are heading. To his credit, though, Aja still manages to incorporate one major plot surprise. **Mark Samuels**

ℹ Mark Romanek was initially set to direct KC Coughlin and Ryan Grassby's script, when the project was titled *Mother Land*.

"Hey guys, your film looks a bit ropey, ha ha, get it?"

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THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RINGS OF POWER Season Two

Sauron runs rings around the Elves

★★★★½

- UK/US **Prime Video, streaming now**
- Showrunners **JD Payne, Patrick McKay**
- Cast **Morfydd Clark, Charlie Vickers, Charles Edwards, Owain Arthur**

EPISODES 2.01-2.08 **There's a lot** going on in *The Rings Of Power* season two: battles, betrayals, revolution, insurrection trolls, the Balrog, sea monsters, rings being forged and abused, multiple *Game Of Thrones*-style shocking murders, the Stranger being tested, a new villain... Its eight episodes – despite each easily sailing past the hour mark – struggle to find one storyline to bind them all at times.

But it's a struggle worth the effort. Because while the to-ing and fro-ing between the parallel plots may not always be elegant, and leaves a couple of them frustratingly underdeveloped, the result is some of the most genuinely exciting and emotionally stirring epic fantasy TV has ever seen.

The season opens with a lengthy, and wonderfully gruesome, prologue showing the fall and resurrection of Sauron. His journey then becomes the backbone of the season, as the Lord of Deceit – pretty much Loki with a humour bypass, as played by Charlie Vickers – uses charm and illusion to coax hubristic elven smith Celebrimbor (Charles Edwards) into making more Rings of Power.

Edwards and Vickers are riveting to watch throughout as Sauron mentally deconstructs the elf, and Celebrimbor tries to keep hold of his dignity. You get to the point where a tiny muscle spasm in Sauron's cheek sends a chill down your spine.

Elsewhere the Stranger and his Harfoot travelling companions search for the wizard's origins. There's some business with a Dark Wizard and another halfling tribe that's fairly forgettable; Ciarán Hinds's barely utilised baddie sorcerer is one of the biggest disappointments of the season, though he has an impressive hissy fit at one point.

But this section is saved by the introduction of Tom Bombadil. In the books he's an odd character, one who could easily go very wrong on screen, but with the ever-reliable Rory Kinnear taking a counter-intuitively lowkey approach, he's a joy to watch.

The Dwarves are as much fun as they were in the first season, but watching King Durin fall under the spell of the ring adds a whole new edginess. The Elves do even more movie-Legolas-style acrobatic fighting. And there's an intriguing subplot with Galadriel and Orc-daddy Adar sizing each other up.

The Men, however, come out of the season less well. The Numenorean politicking vanishes from most episodes and is dealt with in an almost perfunctory, tick-box manner. Isuldur could easily be written out entirely.

It all looks spectacular and sumptuous, with some impressive battles, action set-pieces and awesome Ents (voiced by Jim Broadbent and Olivia Williams). But the season really could have done with a couple more episodes to beef up some of the plot elements. **Dave Golder**

"Name's Tom Bombadil. @Tombadil on Insta."

i The season's first line, spoken by Sauron ("Always after a defeat...") is a Gandalf quote from *The Fellowship Of The Ring*.

LEGO STAR WARS: REBUILD THE GALAXY

★★★☆☆

- UK/US **Disney+, streaming now**
- Showrunners **Dan Hernandez, Benji Samit**
- Cast **Gaten Matarazzo, Tony Revolori, Bobby Moynihan, Marsai Martin**

EPISODES 1.01-1.04 **Lego** animation *Rebuild The Galaxy* is assembled from one of the most promising ideas in recent *Star Wars* history. After inadvertently removing a mystical Lego brick from a Jedi temple, scruffy-looking nerf herder Sig Greebling (*Stranger Things*' Gaten Matarazzo) is transported to a radically different version of your favourite galaxy.

The reinvention stretches way beyond "Spock's got a goatee" too, because in this fun new timeline Luke Skywalker is an ageing surfer dude, Admiral Ackbar has been replicated as a legion of Clone Troopers, and – in a neat callback to a longstanding internet theory – Jar Jar Binks is now a Sith Lord.

Unfortunately, this four-part miniseries isn't quite as clever as that wonderful premise. *Rebuild The Galaxy* barely scratches the surface of its characters' new circumstances, hoping instead that big-name cameos will cover up any deficiencies in the storytelling.

The show's on firmer ground when it plays around in the Lego toybox – particularly when the visuals echo beloved *Lego Star Wars* videogames. With a bit more ambition, this could have been a real treat. **Richard Edwards**

TWILIGHT OF THE GODS Season One

Ragnarök out with your cock out

★★★½☆

UK/US **Netflix, streaming now**

Creators **Zack Snyder, Eric Carrasco, Jay Oliva**

Cast **Sylvia Hoeks, Stuart Martin, Pilou Asbæk, Paterson Joseph**

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 **Zack Snyder** returns to animation, joining *Supergirl* writer Eric Carrasco and cartoon veteran Jay Oliva for this tale based on Norse mythology.

The story follows a warrior-woman called Sigrid who swears revenge on Thor after he massacres her family on her wedding day. Alongside her betrothed Leif, Sigrid assembles a squad of fighters to face the god of thunder, while the duplicitous Loki tries to manipulate events.

Animated by French studio Xilam, *Twilight Of The Gods* struggles to match its visual aesthetic with Snyder's desire to make an edgy, adults-only series. The character designs and animation recall *Samurai Jack*, with figures rendered with strong, simple shapes and large, expressive features.

Meanwhile, the battles are violent and extremely bloody, in the manner of *Invincible*, and there's abundant nudity and explicit sex (plus a bloodbath at a wedding). The results can feel like Cartoon Network does *Game Of Thrones*. The scripts are stronger on plot than character depth, with most of the supporting cast drawn with scant detail, while potentially intriguing ideas are clumsily articulated. God of light Baldr appears as a Christ-like figure, but the writers muddy the waters by subsequently comparing Odin with Christ in a scene that bespeaks a lack of thematic clarity.

> **"It feels lightweight and scattershot"**

Action scenes are fast-paced and build their intensity to the grand finale, but the series lacks heart, despite a strong performance from Sylvia Hoeks as Sigrid.

It's certainly visually striking, but for all the shagging and slaughter, it feels lightweight and scattershot. **David West**

i Mortal, giant, god, monster... everyone shags everyone, reflecting Snyder's desire for characters who have "zero hang-ups".

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PRODUCED BY VAL LEWTON

Under The Shadow

★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

RELEASED 14 OCTOBER

1943 | 12 | 4K/Blu-ray

Directors **Jacques Tourneur, Mark Robson**

Cast **James Ellison, Frances Dee, Tom Conway, Jean Brooks, Isabel Jewell**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **We have Orson** Welles to thank. As prestige productions like *Citizen Kane* failed at the box office, RKO looked to low-budget horror to make a buck.

But the man they placed in charge, producer Val Lewton, resisted apeing Universal, deploying shadows, suggestion and psychology, not monsters. Both films in this Criterion Collection double-bill follow the template, conveying a sense of entrapment as light streams through blinds, projecting bars onto human figures.

Set on fictional Caribbean island Saint Sebastian, *I Walked With A Zombie* sees a nurse (Frances Dee) hired to care for a plantation owner's catatonic wife, eventually turning to the Vodou tradition.

The film's surely inspired PhD theses on racial representation. While references to "native nonsense" and "primitive people" prompt a wince, it also provides some decent roles for black actors.

A mournful, doomy tale, it peaks with its heroine's unforgettably eerie passage through rustling cane to the "houmfort" (Vodou temple) – encountering Carre-Four (Darby Jones), a towering, blank-eyed sentinel en route.

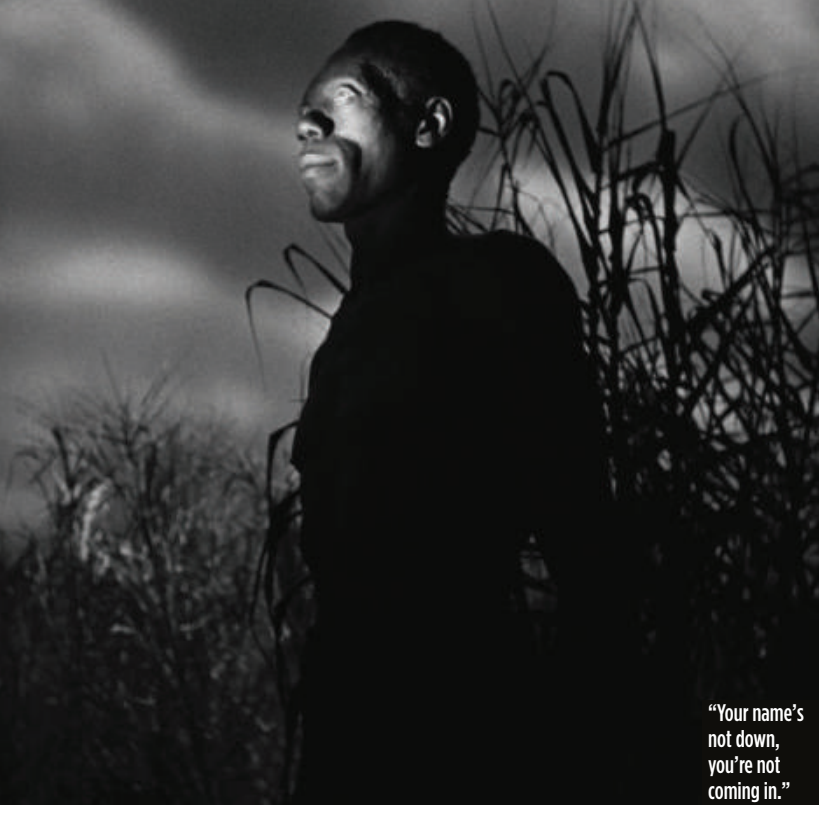
The Seventh Victim is a morbid affair, centred on a woman who's lost the will to live. Kim Hunter plays the schoolgirl searching New York for missing sister Jacqueline (Jean Brooks), who turns out to be entangled with a secret society. It boasts some powerful scenes. In one, we see inside a room Jacqueline's rented: it houses just a chair and a noose. In another, a darkened corridor is rendered horribly ominous, as a character is swallowed up by inky blackness.

The main problem is that – perhaps with an eye on the censors – these high society devil worshippers are so ineffectual: they chant no incantations, daub no pentacles, sacrifice zero goats.

The character list is also awfully overcrowded. None of this, however, will prevent many viewers embracing Brooks's lost soul as a goth icon.

Extras Film critic Imogen Sara Smith addresses both films in a first-rate talking head (47 minutes), underlining how both trade in "questions raised and not answered". "Celebrity fans" including Guillermo del Toro and the late William Friedkin contribute to boys-only 2005 doc "Shadows In The Dark" (53 minutes); it offers a decent, brisk overview of Lewton's RKO work.

A piece extracted from PBS series *Monstrum* (13 minutes) explores the phenomena of the Haitian zombie. Two purplish excerpts from suavely toned podcaster Adam Roche's *The Secret History Of Hollywood* explore the lives of actors Jean Brooks (53 minutes) and Tom Conway (70 minutes). Both films have critical commentaries: Kim Newman and Stephen Jones team up on *Zombie*; Steve Haberman tackles *Victim*. Plus: trailers; booklet. **Ian Berriman**



"Your name's not down, you're not coming in."

> "Deploy shadows, suggestion and psychology"

i The girls' school seen at the start of *The Seventh Victim* reuses a set from Orson Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons*.

EXORCIST II: THE HERETIC

★★★☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★½☆

RELEASED 7 OCTOBER

1977 | 18 | Blu-ray

Director **John Boorman**

Cast **Linda Blair, Richard Burton, Louise Fletcher, Max von Sydow**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Slated by author** William Peter Blatty for missing the point, and voted the second worst film of all time in 1980, *Exorcist II* has a bad rep.

Richard Burton plays a priest tasked with investigating Father Merrin's death. After hypnotic communions with Regan and trips to Africa, he learns she's one of several teens whose healing powers led them to be targetted by Satan.

It often tips into risibility – a "synchroniser" device which creates the pair's psychic bond (via two halogen bulbs and an audio tone) is especially goofy. But sequences of locust swarms (Pazuzu is established as a god of "evil spirits of the air") and a "rock church" in Ethiopia impress. And the climactic battle is amusingly bonkers.

The Heretic has ambition. In the wake of *The Exorcist: Believer*'s bland timidity, that's something you can appreciate.

Extras Choose the theatrical cut or the shorter International cut. Of five commentaries (one by the director), two are brand new; the enthusiasm of two Aussies who champion the film proves infectious. Interviewed in 2018 (19 minutes), Linda Blair recalls being awe-struck by Burton, despite his reliance on cue cards. A trite video essay (12 minutes) is largely spent synopsising the film you've just watched. Plus: editor interview (seven minutes); galleries; trailers; booklet. **Ian Berriman**

GAIRA'S GUTS TRILOGY

Pinky And Deranged

★★½☆☆ EXTRAS ★★½☆☆

RELEASED 7 OCTOBER

1986/1987 | 18 | Blu-ray

Director **Kazuo Komizu**

Cast **Saeko Kizuki, Megumi Ozawa, Keiko Asano**

Always keep the Twister instructions handy, kids.

BLU-RAY DEBUT **We don't make a** habit of reviewing soft porn, but this box set warrants an exception, blending the Japanese "pink film" with horror. All three films share a director, but no plot threads – just a commitment to testing your tolerance for extremity.

In *Guts Of A Virgin*, the team from a glamour shoot hole up in an house after getting lost in fog, then are picked off by a mud-smeared thing from the woods. It delivers the set's most startling image: a young woman who's gone gaga masturbating with a torn-off arm.

Mind you, *Guts Of A Beauty* provides, er, stiff competition, via a penile riff on the chestburster scene from *Alien*. Here a nurse takes revenge for the victim of a Yakuza gang, but ends up the subject of their attentions. Finally, *Rusted Body* follows four torturers trying to extract the code for a safe from a banker, throwing in a high-tech sex bed that lets you vicariously experience sensations.

We generally get into the filth without even rudimentary "Hi, I've come to fix your plumbing" niceties, and rationales for the horror content are rarely forthcoming. Why does *Beauty*'s heroine eventually turn into a monster resembling the skinned Frank from *Hellraiser*, except with a raging, snappy-teethed hard-on? Answers on a postcard.

Odd moments of artistry suggest there's more to director Kazuo Komizu: one hammer kill involves over 20 cuts and symbolic flashes, like a pail of water being thrown. But there's no escaping the cruelty meted out – particularly in the first two films, whose fascination with rape is depressingly nihilistic.

⊕ **Extras** An interview with the now 77-year-old Komizu is split into two parts (18 minutes/15 minutes). Both are rambling, bordering on the incoherent. One statement sums up his philosophy: "It'd be a crime if you actually did it, but you're free to fantasise". Plus: trailers; galleries; booklet. **Ian Berriman**

ℹ "Gaira" is just a nickname which Komizu acquired – it's the name of a kaiju in 1966 film *The War Of The Gargantuas*.

A QUIET PLACE IN THE COUNTRY

A brush with the supernatural

★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★½☆

RELEASED 28 OCTOBER

1968 | 15 | Blu-ray

Director **Elio Petri**

Cast **Franco Nero, Vanessa Redgrave, Georges Géret, Gabriella Boccardo**

"Give a little respeeeect tooo-ooooh MEEEEE!"

BLU-RAY DEBUT **If you're thinking** "The first one was rural too, that's not original", then back up: this quasi-giallo has nothing to do with monsters that hunt by sound. It's a ghost story – the type where the protagonist's fractured psyche might explain everything.

Inspired by Oliver Onions's 1911 story "The Beckoning Fair One", it follows Leonardo (Franco Nero), an abstract expressionist painter who, feeling blocked, decides on a move to the country, and is drawn to an abandoned villa. After various unexplained events, he digs into its history, growing obsessed by a Countess who lived and died there – apparently strafed by an Allied plane.

Flashing his piercing blue eyes, the *Django* star brings a manic intensity that's matched by Elio Petri's confrontational directorial style. The titles deliver avant garde visuals backed by a cacophonous improv group racket. A bizarre dream sequence follows, which combines mild bondage with satire of consumerism.

Elsewhere, present and past are blurred together, while various surreal eruptions express the hero's mental state: when Leonardo visits the Countess's elderly mother, she keeps turning into a coffin, in homage to a surreal painting by René Magritte.

A typically atypical work by a director who resisted ploughing the same furrow, it's a film which seems way ahead of its time.

⊕ **Extras** Film writer Stephen Thrower provides an informative, astute talking head on the film's influences, production and themes (49 minutes). In a 2017 interview (32 minutes), Nero showers Petri with praise, calling him "the Italian Kubrick".

There's also scene-specific commentary on eight sequences (40 minutes), which saves you having to listen to meagre academic insights for the entire duration. Plus: make-up artist interview (14 minutes); trailer; booklet. **Ian Berriman**

ℹ At one point, Nero couldn't stop laughing at co-star Georges Géret's French accent. So Petri slapped him in the face.

APARTMENT 7A

A bun in the coven

★★★☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2024 | 15 | SVOD

Director **Natalie Erika James**

Cast **Julia Garner, Dianne Wiest, Jim Sturgess, Kevin McNally**

PARAMOUNT+ **Give the Devil his** due date. From *Immaculate* to *The First Omen* to this prequel to *Rosemary's Baby*, 2024 is clearly the age of Satanic conception.

Ozark's Julia Garner is Terry Gionoffrio, a minor character in Roman Polanski's 1968 classic. A pill-popping aspiring Broadway dancer, she takes a room in New York's Bramford building, where the seemingly benevolent neighbours are secretly an occult cabal intent on throwing a baby shower for the Antichrist.

There's a persuasive recreation of '60s New York, conjured with muted colour, and while the film never matches the skin-prickling paranoia of Polanski's original its gloomy rooms and murmuring, half-snatched conversations create an immersively unsettling atmosphere. The scares may be tepid but the occasional musical number, complete with faux-Busby Berkeley choreography, provides flashes of hallucinatory invention; counter-intuitive in a horror movie, maybe, but it works.

But this may as well be a remake as a prequel, so similar are the beats. There's little addition to the existing lore and, given that we know Terry's fate going in, no great surprises. It's watchable enough, but ultimately this is a story that never quite convinces you it needed to be told.

Nick Setchfield

i *Rosemary's Baby* has a forgotten sequel in 1976 TV movie *Look What's Happened To Rosemary's Baby*, starring Patty Duke.

"Hey, that's the number of my apartment up there."

TURN ME ON

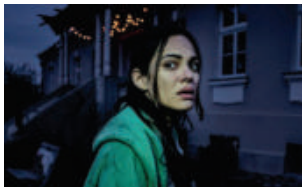
★★★☆☆

RELEASED 7 OCTOBER

2024 | N/A | Download

This romantic black comedy is set in a cult-like, dystopian society. Bel Powley stars as a woman in a peaceful community who misses a dose of an emotion-numbing "vitamin". Free of its influence, she discovers laughter, closely followed by sex, and starts to spread the word – but it isn't long until emotions get messy.

It's decently acted and directed, with soothing cinematography, but given that you're an *SFX* reader, you'll have seen this story a million times before. Watch *THX 1138* instead. **Jayne Nelson**



HOME SWEET HOME

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2024 | 15 | Download

Rising above its risible title – *Home Sweet Home: Where Evil Lives*, in its full awfulness – this German chiller proves to be an effective mix of suspense and the supernatural.

Alone in her new home, a pregnant woman faces not only unquiet spirits but a more personal reckoning with her country's genocidal past.

As a single, continuous shot summons an escalating sense of dread through creaks, footsteps and fading light, it's an exercise in paranoia that makes a virtue of its confines.

Nick Setchfield

AZRAEL: ANGEL OF DEATH

★★★½☆ EXTRAS ☆☆☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!/ 31 OCTOBER

2024 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

Simon Barrett (*You're Next*) penned this gnarly horror set post-Rapture, among survivors who have renounced speech. Escaping a sacrifice to throat-ripping beings in the forest, a woman runs the gamut of life-threatening scenarios.

As an experiment in dialogue-free storytelling, it's initially fascinating, and Samara Weaving proves equal to the challenge. But there isn't much to it beyond constant peril.

Extras None. **Ian Berriman**

HAUNTED ULSTER LIVE

★★★☆☆

RELEASED 14 OCTOBER

2024 | N/A | Download

***Ghostwatch Belfast*, in a** nutshell. Like the Beeb's notorious faux live broadcast, clearly the template, it sees a '90s TV crew visiting a family plagued by strange goings-on.

It's a likeable effort, with – thanks to adverts which reveal inter-crew friction – more humour than the original, and the odd neck hair-troubling moment. But there's nothing here as chilling as the original's Mr Pipes, and attempts to mix in a sci-fi element make zero sense. **Ian Berriman**

ODDITY

★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
2024 | 15 | SVOD
Director **Damian McCarthy**
Cast **Gwilym Lee, Carolyn Bracken, Tadhg Murphy, Caroline Menton**

SHUDDER **We called Damian** McCarthy's 2020 debut *Caveat* "hauntingly odd", and can dust that phrase off for his follow-up, which confirms the Irish writer/director as a horror auteur.

In a strange way, it's a whodunnit. In a gripping prologue, a woman renovating a country house gets a knock on the door, and a warning that someone's sneaked inside. But can the one-eyed man who delivers it – an ex-patient of her shrink husband – be trusted?

Post-titles, we learn Dani was murdered. No need to call in Poirot here though, since her blind twin Darcy can psychically "read" objects, and a year on, has acquired the supposed killer's glass eye...

Aply named, *Oddity* has plenty of striking qualities: the unfussy, rather timeless presentation; the quietness which allows you to pick up on every sinister creak; moments of excruciating tension; its surrealist tendencies.

Caveat had a dream logic vibe, and the same is true here, as you question why no one runs a mile from *Oddity*'s creepiest creation: a life-sized wooden mannequin, mouth open in a perpetual Munch scream, which seems to move about under its own steam.

A ticking time-bomb of a cursed object, it's just one source of a plentiful store of scares, some of which may have you leaping out of your skin. **Ian Berriman**

"Come... closer..." "Yes?" "Nice wig. HA!"

TIGON COLLECTION

Big Moth Strikes Again

RELEASED OUT NOW!
1968/1972 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD
Directors **Vernon Sewell, Peter Sasdy**
Cast **Peter Cushing, Wanda Ventham, Ian Bannen, Judy Geeson**

Two further exhumations from the Tigon vault see the Brit studio taking markedly different approaches to screen horror.

The Blood Beast Terror ★★☆☆☆ shamelessly apes the style of rival Hammer's period chillers, complete with star Peter Cushing. While a blood-thirsting moth-monster makes for an intriguing spin on the traditional vampire, the thrills are distinctly lacking, scuppered by pedestrian direction and one of the most anticlimactic pay-offs in movie history. In 1968 this already felt like a relic.

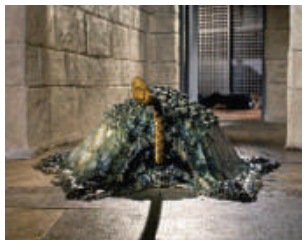
Capitalising on a recent, topically minded TV hit – even as it cruelly sidelines the show's stars – the big-screen version of **Doomwatch** ★★★☆☆ is more of the moment. It might even be ahead of that moment, given its enduring ecological concerns and curious pre-echoes of *The Wicker Man*. Star Ian Bannen's performance is overwrought and the story lacks a suitably cinematic scale, but a fabulous score, eerie location and bleak sensibility give this otherwise mundane spin-off a certain haunting quality.

> **"Shamelessly apes the style of rival Hammer"**

Extras The Blood Beast Terror ★★★½☆ has commentary by movie historian John Hamilton and Howard Canning, the film's editor, who's also profiled on-camera (24 minutes). A Making Of rounds up cast and crew (31 minutes).

Doomwatch ★★★½☆ includes an intro by director Peter Sasdy (two minutes), who also supplies a commentary; a second track by critics Kim Newman and Sean Hogan provides fascinating supplemental background. There's also a Making Of (15 minutes) and a standalone interview with star Jean Trend, who shares memories of the TV show (13 minutes). Both films come with trailers, galleries and booklets. **Nick Setchfield**

i Cushing's unhappiness with his original toupée reportedly shut down production on *The Blood Beast Terror* for a week.



ISLAND OF TERROR

★★★½☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
1966 | PG | Blu-ray/DVD
Director **Terence Fisher**
Cast **Edward Judd, Peter Cushing, Carole Gray, Eddie Byrne**

Sharing an island setting, a star (Peter Cushing), a director (Hammer stalwart Terence Fisher), and a production company (Planet Film Productions) with *Night Of The Big Heat*, this British horror is superior to its stablemate.

A dapper Peter Cushing (hat jauntily angled) is a pathologist summoned to explore the mystery of a jelly-like corpse, completely lacking in calcium phosphate. Turns out a lab's cancer research has spawned bone-sucking beasties, that can reproduce at a rapid rate.

The film boasts a palpable sense of urgency and some shocks that are surprisingly tough for a PG, and Cushing's character has a nice line in wry quips. But it's the "Silicates" that are the main draw. Resembling warty horseshoe crabs with trunk-like appendages, their weirdness is further boosted by Gerry Anderson collaborator Barry Gray's electronic effects – the sort of thing that gets subtitled [OMINOUS SOUND].

It's a film where women only exist to say "I'm so frightened!", mind. And Irish viewers in particular may bristle at the patrician attitudes of the investigating boffins, who initially keep the locals in the dark, then treat them like so many cattle to be corralled.

Extras Film writer David Flint's commentary has solid observations, but is never wildly insightful. Plus: trailer; gallery; booklet. **Ian Berriman**

Apple is still trying to flog the Vision Pro in 2224.

UGLIES

Pretty Vacant

★★★☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2024 | 12 | SVOD

Director **McG**

Cast **Joey King, Brianne Tju, Keith Powers, Laverne Cox**

NETFLIX **Scott Westerfeld wrote** his novel *Uglies* in 2005, three years before the first *Hunger Games* book was published. The film rights sold in 2006. Stuck in development hell ever since, the movie's actual arrival on Netflix in 2024 feels like something from the Victorian era; the dystopian YA genre has long gone.

Still, while *Uglies* missed the boat timing-wise, it's not actually that bad. A few hundred years from now, humans live happy lives with no war and suffering. How did they achieve this? By inventing surgery to make themselves "pretty": if everyone is beautiful, there can be no strife! Of course this is highly dubious, as 15-year-old Tally (Joey King) discovers.

While impatiently awaiting her surgery, she's drawn into a rebellion by a group who want to stay "ugly" (although this is Hollywood, so none of the actors actually are).

All the worn-out YA dystopian clichés are here, with a lively cast trying hard to make them seem fresh. And it kind of works: the neon-bright future-world is fascinating, there are cool hoverboards, and it's intriguing considering how shallow we are as a society. Would *you* work with a dictator for a nicer bum? Enjoyable, then, but ultimately unnecessary.

Jayne Nelson

i Westerfeld has another book being adapted for Netflix: *Leviathan*, an anime about the First World War.

THE HITCHER

SFX Loves

Thumbs up

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

RELEASED OUT NOW!

1986 | 15 | 4K/Blu-ray

Director **Robert Harmon**

Cast **Rutger Hauer, C Thomas Howell, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Jeffrey DeMunn**

A young man picks up a hitchhiker, who pulls a knife. After kicking him out, he's pursued by the psycho, who frames him for a series of killings: an escalating nightmare, in broad daylight.

In other hands, that storyline could have resulted in pure trash, but they captured lightning in a bottle here. It's a fascinating blend of thriller, horror and increasingly explosive action, with a tinge of fantasy. Forever turning up out of nowhere, the Hitcher almost feels omniscient. Is he just a man, or something else? A figment of the imagination? A Reaper? Some kind of demonic Guardian Angel?

As the young Jim, C Thomas Howell is as sympathetic as he is photogenic, while Rutger Hauer's idiosyncratic choices further elevate the material; their dynamic is fascinatingly ambiguous, with the Hitcher taking an almost fatherly pride in how his prey responds to the trials he sets.

The film looks stunning too. Director Robert Harmon and DoP John Seale render the American road, with its heat-hazy highway, gas stations and cafes, an infernal space, but one which, thanks to its widescreen desert vistas, possesses a ravishing beauty too.

Extras New interviews with Howell, Harmon, Seale, the writer and the composer (totalling 136 minutes) all prove interesting: there are amusing anecdotes about Hauer's eccentricities, and Howell is so animated it's practically a performance in its own right.

Do we detect a subtle nod to *Blade Runner*, perhaps?

The highlight is "China Lake" (35 minutes, 1983), an exceptional, creepy short whose thematic similarities helped land Harmon the gig; it's also discussed by the director (15 minutes).

There are three commentaries: a new critical one; two with crew. An edition of podcast *The Projection Booth* (guesting Harmon and Hauer) plays out over the film too. You also get a perceptive visual essay (20 minutes) focused on Hauer's character; a 2002 retrospective, which adds the voice of producer Ed Feldman; and "Telephone", a short by the writer (26 minutes, 1986). The Limited Edition comes with six art cards, a 200-page book, and the script. **Ian Berriman**

i In Eric Red's original script, young Jim discovers an eyeball in his cheeseburger, rather than a finger in his fries...

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THE OUTCASTS

★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

1982 | 15 | Blu-ray

Director **Robert Wynne-Simmons**

Cast **Mary Ryan, Mick Lally, Cyril Cusack**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Though, as** Robert Wynne-Simmons insists, it's not really folk horror, this later work by the director of *Blood On Satan's Claw* should appeal to fans of the subgenre.

Another rural tale with a pagan sense of the mystery of nature, it's set in pre-famine Ireland, and centres on the "simple" Maura (beautifully played by Mary Ryan), who encounters Scarf Michael (Mick Lally), a "wild fellow" reputed to own a violin stringed with dead men's hair. He's more of a mischief-maker, using his magical fiddle for pranks – like turning a woman's lover into a goat. Their association sees Maura denounced as a witch.

It's an earthy affair with an authentic sense of place, majestic images of rugged beauty, and a sometimes poetic turn of phrase ("I feel wide open, like a window" declares Maura). You shouldn't expect high drama, or crystal clarity (the nature of Michael's powers remains opaque), but the film does achieve the director's aim of creating "a new myth in the ancient tradition".

⊕ **Extras** Wynne-Simmons is interviewed (nine minutes), and talks through a gallery of photos (15 minutes). His primitive teenage short "The Fugitive" (31 minutes) is only of interest for glimpses of Brighton in 1964. A folk horror scholar provides a waffly commentary. Plus: an Irish folklore-themed animated short (five minutes); trailer; booklet. **Ian Berriman**

THE SWORD AND THE SORCERER

Sordid sorcery

★★☆☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

RELEASED 7 OCTOBER

1982 | 15 | 4K & Blu-ray

Director **Albert Pyun**

Cast **Lee Horsley, Kathleen Beller, Richard Lynch, Richard Moll**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **1982 was a vintage** year for film – *ET*, *Blade Runner*. But its most profitable indie was this sweaty mess, due to *Conan* hype and a shoestring budget.

It's your classic muscular fantasy. Princess Alana hires warrior Talon to overthrow a usurper and free her people. He wields a three-pronged sword that can launch its blades like rockets. David Whitaker's triumphant music owes a debt to John Williams, but it's a perfect fit. There are excellent lo-fi effects, like faces coming alive on a tomb, and star Lee Horsley exudes charismatic swagger.

However, it's a difficult watch. Stuntman Jack Tyree died following a misjudged cliff leap. The scene is still present, so 11 minutes in, you see a man's death. And its attitude towards women is lamentable. The producers made their money on sexploitation flicks, and insisted on nude harem scenes. The use of sexual violence as a plot device is disturbing; Talon rescues Alana from rapists, only to demand a night with her as payment. Of its time maybe, but there are 1982 hits that *don't* resort to threats of non-consensual sex.

⊕ **Extras** Seven interviews (totalling 125 minutes) are carried over from Shout! Factory's 2022 US release. Kathleen Beller is the only actor quizzed, but the crew shares behind-the-scenes nuggets about a troubled shoot.

Albert Pyun is particularly candid, revealing that David Hasselhoff was in line to star, until they realised he "had twigs for arms and little chicken legs". Plus: director's commentary; a "Trailers From Hell" piece; trailers; gallery. You also get three art cards, a poster and a booklet. **Dave Bradley**

ℹ The end credits tease a sequel. It took 30 years: Kevin Sorbo starred in follow-up *Tales Of An Ancient Empire* in 2012.

ROUND UP

Russell Crowe plays an actor in a possession movie in **THE EXORCISM** (7 October, Blu-ray/DVD). Director Joshua John Miller's dad played Father Karras in *The Exorcist*, and it reprises some of that film's seminal moments. We said: "Barely registers as a footnote to William Friedkin's masterclass." No extras. High-concept slasher **IN A VIOLENT NATURE** (out now, Blu-ray/DVD) is told from the killer's POV, with the camera roaming after its vengeful corpse. We said: "Appealingly grungy moments, and the kills are inventive. But is that enough to justify a full-length running time?" No extras again here. **KINGDOM OF THE PLANET OF THE APES** (out now, 4K/Blu-ray/DVD) leaps forward 200 years, following an innocent chimp whose community is wrecked by a bonobo dictator. We said: "Refreshes the franchise by creating the space for some impressive world-building." Bonuses: a 22-minute Making Of; 14 deleted scenes. **A QUIET PLACE: DAY ONE** (7 October, 4k/Blu-ray/DVD) follows Lupita Nyong'o's terminally ill poet in a Manhattan overrun by monsters who hunt by sound. We said: "Tries to do something tonally different with a firmly established formula." Fifty minutes of bonuses: five featurettes, plus deleted scenes. Finally, the latest TV box sets include **INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE** Season Two (7 October, Blu-ray/DVD), **THE WALKING DEAD: DARYL DIXON** Season One (out now, Blu-ray/DVD) and **THE WALKING DEAD: DEAD CITY** Season One (7 October, Blu-ray/DVD).

First Read
AN EXTRACT FROM A NEW BOOK

The Coven

by Harper L Woods

"YOUR DESTINY IS NOT TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT. YOUR DESTINY IS TO DESTROY US ALL."

To reclaim her magical birthright, a rebellious witch must infiltrate the hallowed halls of Hollow's Grove University – and go up against its dangerously charming headmaster

The woman driving turned off the main road that led into the town of Salem, Massachusetts, according to the signs.

I'd never been there, obviously, having needed to stay as far away from Crystal Hollow as possible. My mom had told me the stories of what had become of the town that had once been the home to our ancestors, how the stories of the witches hanged there had become what the town was known for, and the way tourists flocked there during the entirety of October.

Somehow it felt like the perfect karma to me that the town was known for the people it had tried to rid itself of, the persecutors fading into history. It felt like something that would have brought me peace from beyond the grave.

The Headmaster of Hollow's Grove sat beside me, typing frantically on his cell phone. His thumbs flew over the screen with speed that should have been impossible, a blur as I swallowed down the surge of unease in my throat and gut.

His face was set into a stern expression, as if whoever waited on the other side of the conversation had annoyed him to no end. His inky, dark hair was subtly swept back from his face, revealing his square jaw and the well-trimmed facial hair that framed it. Looking at the straight nose that fully defined his profile, I knew just how difficult my father's plan would be with him at the helm of the Vessels.

If he knew what I was or what I'd come to do, he'd close the distance between us and tear out my throat before I even had time to beg for my life. The fact that I wasn't loyal to the Coven any more than I was the Vessels wouldn't save me.

Not when he discovered I was the one who could Unmake him, reducing his Vessel to the mud it had been created from and sending his soul back to the pits of Hell.

He glanced toward me, forcing me to turn my stare out the window. I swallowed down my irritation that I'd been caught studying him, staring at what I could only assume was a face he was used to using to get his way. Where he probably thought I was interested, I'd only been sizing up the task ahead of me.

Seduce the Vessel.

Learn what he knows.

Find the bones.

Nausea churned in my gut at the thought, at the task my own father had laid out for me. There had to be another way to find them, because the thought of me being able to seduce an immortal creature who looked like *that* was laughable. Especially when all he really wanted was to eat me.

And probably not the fun way.

"The Covenant has requested I present you to them as soon as we arrive," he said, tucking his phone into the pocket of his suit jacket.

I leveled him with a glare that must have conveyed exactly what I thought of being brought to the very remains of the woman who had made my mother so miserable she'd left the only home she'd ever known. She'd faked her own death to buy her freedom, killing a woman who looked like her and burning her corpse until it was unrecognisable. Magic of that magnitude took certain sacrifices, in the form of a human one, so my mother had chosen someone who would never be missed.

Even though she'd chosen someone who had abused her own child, who was unrepentant until the end, the death and

> **"If he knew what I'd come to do he'd close the distance between us and tear out my throat"**

The Author

Harper L Woods is the alter ego for Adelaide Forrest. Raised in small-town Vermont, her passion for reading was born during long winters spent with her face buried in the pages of a book. She began to pass time by writing short stories that quickly turned into full-length fiction. She's since published over 15 books. When she isn't writing, Harper can be found spending time with her two young kids, curled up with her dog, dreaming about travel to distant lands.

PORTRAIT © JANE ASHLEY CONVERSE AT J. ASHLEY CONVERSE PHOTOGRAPHY AND IMAGE, STOCK ELEMENTS: R.TSUBIN, MIGUEL SOTOMAYOR/GETTY

what she'd done had haunted my mother until the day she, too, died and joined the afterlife. I would not judge my mother for doing what it took to escape the Coven who sought to control her. I would, however, judge the position the Coven had placed her in, the absolute desperation she must have felt, to be willing to do something so drastically outside the norm for my mother, who was gentle and kind to all she met. It spoke to the evil I would face in my time here, that murder was the *lesser* evil.

I didn't bother to pretend I didn't know of the Covenant. Doing so when I'd clearly known what Thorne was the moment I saw him on my doorstep would be futile.

"What interest would the Covenant have in me, Headmaster Thorne?" I asked, shifting my gaze away from the road that quickly shifted from pavement to dirt. A muscle twitched in his jaw, and I couldn't decide if the formality of the address irritated him somehow.

"You are the last of their living descendants. I think the better question is what *won't* they want from you, Miss Madizza," he said, his voice turning mocking as he said my name.

"And what happens when I have no interest in being their pet witch?" I raised my brow, flinching back when he finally met my heated stare. The gold surrounding his pupils seemed to burn as he studied me, flaming with the warning he wanted me to heed. "You are not the only one who thinks of Crystal Hollow as a prison, but the world isn't yet ready for us to exist in the open. You endangered us all by living outside the wards for as long as you did, with the kind of magic you possess. There is an entire line of magic trapped within your veins until your brother comes of age and claims what is his. Any other witch would have gotten rid of him before he could do so," Headmaster Thorne explained, picking a strand of my deep red hair off his suit. It swayed in the air coming from the car's vents. He dropped it beside me, the only sign of him being remotely affected by our scuffle in the woods.

"Perhaps that selfish greed is why only I remain of the Greens. Maybe the witches deserve the fate that awaits them without connection to the magic that formed the wards," I snapped, staring up at him.

His face was so close to mine as he twisted in his seat, his lips curving up into a little grin. "You'll get no argument from me that the witches are selfish, greedy creatures. Do not forget, your ancestors came into their powers by selling their souls to the devil himself. The magic that flows through your veins may be Green, but your heart is black like all the others in the end."

I scoffed, laughing as I reached between us and poked him in the space where his heart should have been. "At least I have one," I said.

His eyes dropped to the finger against his dress shirt, to the place where only fabric separated us from touch. It trailed leisurely over my finger and hand, up my wrist and sweater-covered arm until it jumped up to meet my gaze.

"I believe the humans have this saying that may serve you well," he said, reaching up to grasp my hand. He squeezed it tightly enough that it felt like my finger bones ground together, lowering it into my lap. "Don't poke the bear?"

"What do you know of humans?" I asked, refusing to look at where he still held my hand.

"I know they don't taste as good as witchlings," he said, bringing my hand to his face. He bent it back, exposing my wrist as he placed it beneath his nose and inhaled my scent.

I drew it back sharply, struggling against his grip as I growled a feral warning. "They're also much less likely to slit your throat while you sleep."

He released my hand finally with a small, crooked smirk – revealing a hint of a single fang. I couldn't tell if it was a threat or a promise, if he meant to instill fear or hoped for something more carnal.

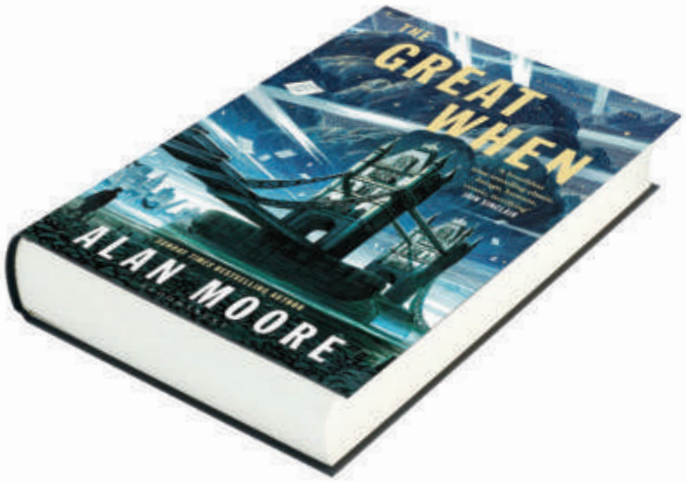
"Does that mean you intend to be in my bed, Witchling?" "Over my dead body," I hissed, turning back to face the window.

Trees surrounded both sides of the road, curving over the gravel to form a canopy. Mist filled the woods around us, stretching toward the sky and casting an eerie presence over the forest that surrounded Crystal Hollow.

"I'll have to come to yours then," Thorne said, making me snap my gaze away from the window and back to glare at him. The arrogance in those steel-blue eyes was everything I dreaded, and I decided it wasn't a matter of threat *or* sin.

It was both.

Read more in The Coven, the gripping and fiery new romantasy novel from New York Times bestselling author Harper L Woods, out on 3 October.



THE GREAT WHEN

London Calling

★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

336 pages | Hardback/ebook

Author **Alan Moore**

Publisher **Bloomsbury**

Alan Moore's latest novel moves out of Northampton (the setting for both 1996's *Voice Of The Fire* and 2016's *Jerusalem*) and away from the comics biz satire of "What We Can Know About Thunderman", from 2022's *Illuminations* collection. It's the first in the writer's Long London quintet, a series set in both the everyday reality of the capital and "the Great When" – the city's imaginal shadow, a place where concepts are incarnated as living beings and only the brave or the foolish dare set foot.

Falling firmly into the latter category is the wonderfully-named Dennis Knuckleyard. It's 1949 and Dennis is 18 years old and condemned to a life working for formidable bookshop owner Coffin Ada (so-called because she can't stop cough cough coughing, and also for more sinister reasons).

Idly dreaming of one day becoming a spy, Dennis is a hapless, hopeless and bumbling protagonist who stumbles into real trouble when Ada sends him out on a job and he accidentally comes into possession of a book from the Great When. It shouldn't exist in our world, and if he doesn't get it back there sooner rather than later he will meet a very sticky end.

It's a deceptively simple plot for a book that is anything but. *The Great When* has shades of other alternative London novels; the fantastical characters and creatures inevitably bring to mind Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, but in style and ambition this is closer to Michael Moorcock's *Mother London*, or the psychogeographic writings of Iain Sinclair, both acknowledged inspirations.

It's a novel besotted with the capital, with large parts of the narrative dedicated to Dennis roaming around the vividly realised city. His repeated excursions into the Great When, meanwhile, are lengthy, psychedelic passages that find Moore in pure prose showman mode, full of surreal life and a hyperreal sense of all-at-onceness.

Somewhere along the way Dennis meets Grace Shilling, a worldy-wise sex worker who introduces him to London's underbelly of gangsters, writers and artists. This gives Moore the excuse to explore some of his favourite real-life hobby horses, from weird fiction author Arthur Machen (whose 1934 short story "N" – itself about the fantastical impinging on everyday Stoke Newington – is vital to the plot) to Austin Osman Spare. An artist who lived in near destitution for much of his life, he has found posthumous acclaim with both art aficionados and occultists in the ensuing decades.

"Awstin" is a major presence in the book, with one chapter reading a little like a beginners' guide to the painter's work. Moore's own masterpiece, the graphic novel *From Hell*, which he created with artist Eddie Campbell, is also unexpectedly invoked, with the book returning to the subject of the Ripper murders once more, albeit here with a more otherworldly explanation.

This is a fascinatingly strange book, one that subverts a

> **"A deceptively simple plot for a book that is anything but"**

seemingly traditional adventure narrative in ways that are both compelling and sometimes confounding. The exact nature of the Great When itself remains elusive, and only fleetingly glimpsed, with much of Moore's attention focussed on his brilliantly evoked and researched '40s London.

Perhaps a deeper exploration is being saved for future volumes, though the book draws much of its eerie power from the restraint with which it mixes the magical and the mundane.

You may also find yourself wondering about the relevance of some of its many tangents, and you will *certainly* be left with questions that come with no guarantee of answers in future books. Only time will tell if The Long London as a whole is another Moore masterpiece, but it's off to a very strong start indeed. **Will Salmon**

i Moore's 1999 spoken word performance *Snakes And Ladders* (later a CD) was told through Arthur Machen's eyes.

THE TAPESTRY OF TIME

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

384 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Author **Kate Heartfield**

Publisher **HarperVoyager**

Threads bind literally and figuratively in this supernatural Second World War thriller. Four sisters blessed with varying degrees of second sight (and varying degrees of acceptance of their gift) play disparate parts in the fight against a Nazi officer who believes the Bayeux Tapestry holds the secret to victory.

One sister is trapped in Vichy France, another trains as a spy, a third is enlisted as a codebreaker at Bletchley Park, while the fourth stays at home with an illegitimate child. They may be separated but their fates are entwined by their gifts.

Too on-the-nose to be classed as magic realism, but too earnest to be considered a ripping yarn, Kate Heartfield's dense and atmospheric confection feels more like a grimmer, character-driven take on *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*, with a lesbian love story for good measure. There's lots of vivid historical detail, a labyrinthine plot and some downright harrowing moments.

Annoyingly, though, for a book so full of action, Heartfield's prose makes the action sequences feel very leaden. And while we keep getting told the sisters are very different characters, there's an overriding stoic forbearance to all their experiences. But that's just a bit of fraying round the edges of a fine piece of work. **Dave Golder**

WILLIAM

★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
224 pages | Hardback/ebook/ audiobook
Author **Mason Coile**
Publisher **Baskerville**

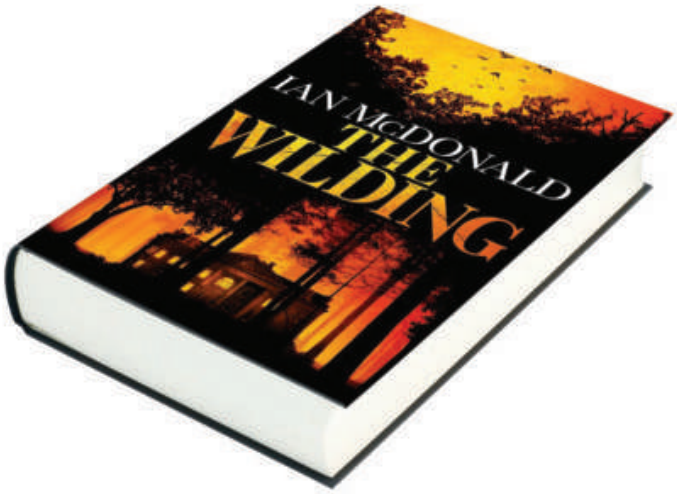
You know that cliché about how struggling couples think having a baby will smooth over their marital woes? Engineers Lily and Henry try it twice over in this nasty little sci-fi horror: Lily's pregnant, and Henry's created a monster.

"William" is an existentially troubled half-robot (head, arms, torso; no legs). He's Henry's pet project, the most advanced creation he's managed to put together since a crippling anxiety disorder stopped him from leaving his high-security smart home.

But if there's something creepy about his initial animatronic efforts (a tiny jerking magician on a bicycle; a mangy-looking dog) then there's something *really* creepy about William. When Lily hosts a Halloween party, the needling of her colleagues prompts Henry to introduce them to William, and the extent of that creepiness becomes clear.

Yes, it's essentially *Frankenstein* with AI. But the moral of Mary Shelley's fable feels pretty relevant as ChatGPT elbows its way into more and more applications, and the descriptions of both William's uncanny form and the gruesome fates suffered by Lily's friends are so vivid that they cut through any seen-it-all-before cynicism.

Short, sharp, and packing a cleverly constructed last act surprise, this Halloween treat should make you think twice before turning to AI. **Sarah Dobbs**



THE WILDING

A difficult bog visit

★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
320 pages | Hardback/ebook
Author **Ian McDonald**
Publisher **Gollancz**

We tend to see our countryside as "natural", but much of it is nothing of the sort. Rather, we look out on curated agricultural landscapes that are often anathema to species that might otherwise flourish. Hence the current interest in rewilding, the idea that ecosystems will regenerate if humankind encourages them to do so – or even just leaves well alone.

But what will grow? In Ian McDonald's latest novel, which makes merry with both the current vogue for folk horror and the trope of placing annoying kids in danger, the answer is something ancient and predatory.

At the centre of the novel lies Lisa, a ranger tasked with leading a group of children and teachers into Lough Carrow, an Irish rewilding project located at what was once a commercial peat bog. It should be a routine trip, a sleepover adventure, but strange things have been happening around Lough Carrow. Animals have been mutilated. The locals have been telling what appear to be tall tales. As they go further into the heart of the wilderness, Lisa and her charges begin to catch glimpses of impossible creatures. Time and space begin to distort in unfathomable ways. The prospect of a night under the stars suddenly becomes terrifying and a prelude to a struggle for survival against the water-soaked land itself – a setup that, to be critical, at moments makes the evil here seem a little too diffuse.

More happily, McDonald is brilliant at evoking a sense of claustrophobia and, in particular, in exploring what the wild brings out in his characters. The recognition of common ground between "bad sisters" Lisa, whose backstory involves the fostering system and a fascination with "other people's fast cars", and tweenager Saoirse, all "nail art and inappropriate shoes", is beautifully written.

It's a novel that, similarly to the recent *Doctor Who* episode "73 Yards", melds the urban and rural to take folk horror somewhere unexpected, spooky and, rather paradoxically, new. **Jonathan Wright**

i The earliest known use of the phrase "folk horror" is in John Fowles's novel *The Magus*, used to describe an African figure.

THE SEARCH FOR BOND

★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
224 pages | Hardback/ebook
Author **Robert Sellers**
Publisher **The History Press**

The recent flurry of clickbait pegging Aaron Taylor-Johnson as heir apparent to that coveted licence to kill proves that James Bond remains the most gossip-worthy gig in cinema.

Hellraisers author Robert Sellers sifts the secret history of the franchise to reveal an entire multiverse of men who were nearly 007, from Richard Burton – a fan of the novels and a favoured choice of Ian Fleming – to Henry Cavill, pipped by Daniel Craig in 2005.

Boosted by exclusive interviews, it's a fascinating litany of close calls, near misses and the occasional narrowly averted disaster, one that seems to take in every alpha male with an Equity card. Oliver Reed was a serious contender but his boozy, brawling rep sank his chances. Patrick McGoohan refused on moral grounds. Other potential 007s feel like some fiendishly surreal SMERSH plot to destabilise Western society: Lord Lucan? Adam West? *Dick Van Dyke?*

While the never-Bonds are the most intriguing part of the story, Sellers is equally illuminating when it comes to the men who did win the role. You realise the sheer enormity of replacing Sean Connery after five world-beating films that redefined the blockbuster – and the audacious gamble of betting all the chips on an unknown male model named Lazenby, George Lazenby. **Nick Setchfield**

THE FANTASY WORLDS OF IRWIN ALLEN

Mr Big

★★★★★

RELEASED 15 OCTOBER
612 pages | Hardback
Author **Jeff Bond**
Publisher **Titan Books**

Art for unmade TV show *The Man From The 25th Century.*

SFX Loves ★★★★★

From TV hits like *Lost In Space* and *Voyage To The Bottom Of The Sea* to such big-screen crowdpleasers as *The Towering Inferno*, producer and director Irwin Allen was as much a brand as a creative force. An old-school Hollywood impresario, he believed in bright colours and broad, poster-splashing premises. Early film *The Animal World* was, we're assured, "2 Billion Years in the Making!"

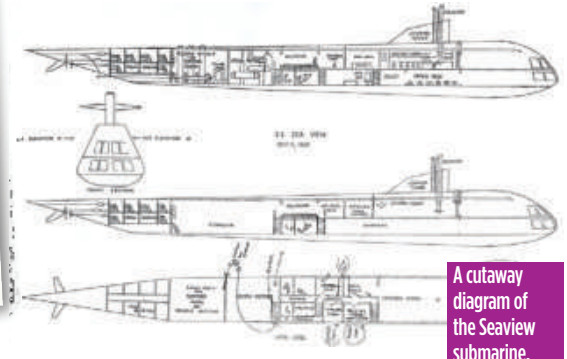
This lavish book celebrates Allen's life and legacy, raiding a personal archive that squirrelled away "every piece of paper, every memo and letter, and every piece of artwork" dating back to 1945. A relentless self-publicist, Allen's ego was large enough to realise the historical importance of this material, and author Jeff Bond builds a thorough, insightful biography around a treasurehouse of original art and storyboards, along with new photos of iconic models and props.

This is also a human story, told with sympathy, of a driven dreamer with a kid's taste for spectacle who ultimately found himself outgunned and overtaken by the likes of George Lucas. In the twilight of his career Allen's office, we learn, is a trailer parked by the studio exit gate.

At over 600 pages it's an outsized blockbuster of a book. You imagine the man himself would approve. **Nick Setchfield**

i Allen's 1978 film *The Swarm* had a cast of millions – between 15 and 22 million bees were reportedly used in the production.

A storyboard for killer bee movie *The Swarm.*



A cutaway diagram of the Seaview submarine.

A *Voyage To The Bottom Of The Sea* giant squid concept.

A sketch for a Cyclops monster from *Lost In Space.*

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THE STARDUST GRAIL

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
320 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook
Author **Yume Kitasei**
Publisher **HarperVoyager**

A motley bunch of treasure hunters – of varying sentience, race and preferred personal pronoun – are on a wormhole-hopping search for an artefact that could start or stop an intergalactic war in this colourful space opera/Indiana Jones hybrid. Honestly, we wouldn't be surprised to learn that the publishers toyed with calling it *Raiders Of The Lost Space Ark*.

Former art thief, now respected xenobiologist Maya Hoshimoto (human), her old partner in crime Auncle (Frenro, a blobby alien race), medical droid Medix (robot with Pinocchio complex) and cyborg soldier Wil (mostly human) are in a race against time to locate the titular Grail. The network of "nodes" that the various races use to nip around the universe is collapsing, and the Grail might fix that. But other alien races have different ideas for it.

Fast-paced, witty and full of memorable, idiosyncratic characters, it's undemanding fun. The only real downside is the rather workmanlike prose, which sucks the oxygen out of action scenes and leaves some of the big revelations oddly devoid of impact. There's also a reliance on, "You betrayed me!" "Yeah, soz." "Oh, s'alright!" moments. But if you're after a sci-fi ripping yarn on a galactic scale, this is the grail you've been looking for. **Dave Golder**

Reviews

MARIGOLD MIND LAUNDRY

★★★☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

248 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Author **Jungeun Yun (translated by Shanna Tan)**

Publisher **Doubleday**

Already a bestseller in Korea, *Marigold Mind Laundry* is the first novel from an author known for her non-fiction. It tells the tale of Jieun, a woman with remarkable powers who has lived a thousand lifetimes in search of her lost family.

Eventually, Jieun settles and opens the Marigold Mind Laundry – a place where people can wash away painful experiences that are holding them back. We hear the stories of a selection of those customers, including an influencer looking for any way out, a woman whose relationship failed, and a man who has never escaped the torture of his childhood bullying. Each is helped to come to terms with their pasts, enabling them to work towards a more positive future.

A lot of the Mind Laundry's lessons can seem trite or simplistic – take responsibility for what you want and do in life; allow yourself to remember love, but move on from hurt – but this remains a charming and engaging tale. It seems to espouse a similar philosophy to cognitive behavioural therapy: you can't control what happens to you but you can take charge of your reactions to it.

It's a lightly spun confection of a story, set in a world filled with real people and their pain, and it's a pleasure to watch them each grow. **Rhian Drinkwater**

UNTIL WE SHATTER

★★★½☆

RELEASED 17 OCTOBER

336 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Author **Kate Dylan**

Publisher **Hodderscape**

Being a magic-user in a society that hates you is, to put it mildly, a bit of a bummer. Cemmy's powers, for example, allow her to shift through spaces, unseen – but as she can't really use them for anything legal, they've become a handy way to steal things. And why not? Let's face it, we probably would, too.

Cemmy is a half-Shade (the child of magical and non-magical parents), whose very existence is illegal. While hiding from the murderous Council of Shades, Cemmy is tricked into an *Ocean's 11*-style heist by a nasty chap named Savian and his underling, Chase.

Forced to risk her life for a mysterious prize, Cemmy soon realises that this isn't a simple job. And worse, Chase is kinda hot, despite being evil... or is he? Eh, either way, he's still hot, and a girl's got needs.

There's a *lot* going on in this YA tale, from a fascinating magical system involving colours to the bigger picture at the heart of Savian's plan.

Sure, the book follows a familiar formula which robs certain plot twists – and even deaths – of their impact. And the fact that Savlan talks like a pantomime villain is rather irritating at times.

But Kate Dylan is clearly an excellent writer, bringing a dark, moody and complicated world to life for what turns out to be an engrossing read. **Jayne Nelson**

LET'S SPLIT UP

★★☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

352 pages | Paperback/ebook

Author **Bill Wood**

Publisher **Scholastic Books**

Poor Buffy barely has time to settle into her new high school before a string of suspicious (and potentially supernatural) murders have whipped her small town into a frenzy. The police are useless, so it's down to her and her new ragtag group of nerdy friends to save the day.

And yes, that really is the synopsis for a YA book released in 2024, not the plot of the first episode of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. Bill Wood's debut is rammed with references, from character names ("Mrs Strode", a creep called Loomis) to character dynamics (our protagonists here could be *Riverdale*'s core four, or the Scooby Gang).

It's a little bit exhausting. We've come full circle, so that teens in horror stories are now referencing *Scream* as a key text. That might not seem especially unrealistic, given how mainstream geek culture is today, but there's a weird glibness to it that feels all the stranger when you consider that this book is set in October 2001. Anyone remember any major world events that happened around that time? Apparently not.

A lack of attention to real-world detail would be forgiveable if the plot was otherwise compelling, but it really isn't: the central mystery is so easy to solve that if it had been a *Buffy* episode, it would've been a skippable mid-season one. **Sarah Dobbs**

REISSUES

Our pick of the paperbacks this month is **THE GATHERING** (★★★★☆, out now, Penguin) by CJ Tudor, author of *The Burning Girls*. This supernatural police procedural is set in

Deadhart, a small town in Alaska where the locals co-exist with a nearby colony of "vampyrs". When a teenager's found with his throat ripped out, blood drained, a female detective investigates. Is a bloodsucker responsible, or a psychopath? We said: "The characters are vividly drawn... Barbara Atkins is one of the most intriguing fictional investigators to have come along in an age." Alix E Harrow's gothic fairytale **STARLING HOUSE** (★★★★☆, out now, Tor) reimagines *Beauty And The Beast*. Its heroine is Opal, a high-school drop-out from

a former mining town who takes a job as a cleaner at the titular mansion, working for its brooding heir Arthur Starling. We said: "Harrow's intention is both to celebrate and subvert Southern Gothic... A novel about post-industrial society and the need for human connection." The paperback edition adds a bonus short story. Finally, **A STROKE OF THE PEN** (★★★☆☆, out now, Penguin) collects 20 short stories that Terry Pratchett wrote for the *Western Daily Press* newspaper in the '70s and '80s, under the

pseudonym Patrick Kearns. We said: "This isn't mature Pratchett work. The stories, so short that ideas are left tantalisingly undeveloped, are the work of a man finding his way... One for completists."

Reviews

BULLET TIME
A BOOK IN BULLET POINTS

THE WORLDS OF GEORGE RR MARTIN

RELEASED 10 OCTOBER
208 pages | **Hardback/ebook (out now)**
Author **Tom Huddleston**
Publisher **Frances Lincoln**

- An in-depth exploration of the life experiences, and historical and literary influences, that shaped George RR Martin's *A Song Of Ice And Fire* novels.
- Focused on the (as-yet unfinished) book series rather than the TV adaptation.
- Even so, the numerous and varied illustrations include plenty of stills from *Game Of Thrones* and *House Of The Dragon* – as well as Martin's favourite genre book covers, medieval artwork, geographical landmarks and more.
- Uses chapter titles based on key Seven Kingdoms locations (Winterfell, King's Landing and so on) as jumping-off points to examine the inspirations behind Westerosi people and places.
- Sometimes a bit too academic to entertain.

JACKAL

★★★★☆

RELEASED 10 OCTOBER
448 pages | **Paperback**
Authors **Erin E Adams**
Publisher **Dead Ink Books**

Coming home is never easy, but it's significantly harder if you are newly single, attending a wedding, and one of the few black women who grew up in a town where those like you have been ritualistically murdered for the past century.

Haitian-American writer Erin E Adams's debut novel terrorises the reader by infusing each chapter with the tensions of a dark racist history, creating some impressively gory imagery – as well as the true horror of attending a wedding while freshly dumped.

Our protagonist Liz returns from Manhattan to her rustbelt hometown to attend the nupitals of her best friend, only for the bride's young black daughter Caroline to go missing – just as many have done before her.

The book tantalisingly dangles both natural and supernatural explanations, while painting a nuanced portrait of living under the shadow of bigotry in a town that's so safe for its white populace.

The conclusion, when it does come, is so bold it borders on unhinged, but Adams's prose never falters and each dynamic in Liz's life is tinged with a subtle poison; heavy with the racist smog that this entire town breathes in.

Due to both its structure and abundance of pithy dialogue, it's a novel that practically begs to be adapted for the screen, to further bring all of its horrors to light. **Leila Latif**

THE TRIPODS: ALL FOR NOTHING?

★★★★½

RELEASED OUT NOW!
300 pages | **Hardback**
Author **Chris Jones**
Publisher **Graphetti Ltd**

Many years in the making, this history of the BBC's cruelly curtailed '80s sci-fi saga is a very impressive labour of love.

It takes you through pre-production and the various stages of filming (regaling us with tales of seasick crew and a near-death incident), plus the two series launches and the aftermath of the decision not to complete the trilogy. Author Chris Jones draws on a deep well of testimony: interviews with 54 cast and crew, from producer Richard Bates to a then 15-year-old extra.

With their help he's accumulated a treasure trove of imagery: candid on-set snaps, continuity Polaroids, costume designs, storyboards, script trims. Priceless artefacts include a letter telling star Jim Baker that the axe has fallen.

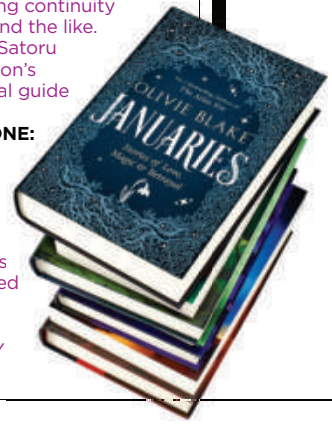
Handsomely designed, it also features highly professional photographs of all the locations, and makes clever use of triangular motifs.

If the book has a flaw, it's a tendency to assume too much knowledge. To get the most out of it you need to know the show like the back of your hand, or do a rewatch before reading – otherwise expect to sometimes only generally get the gist.

Still, given the oof-inducing price (upwards of £45), surely only hardcore fans will buy *All For Nothing?* And there's no doubt that there will never be a better book written about *The Tripods*. **Ian Berriman**

ALSO OUT

As ever, there's loads more books we couldn't fit in, starting with two short story collections. *The Atlas Six* author Olivie Blake's latest, **JANUARIES** (17 October, Tor), offers "a fairy tale twist on the timelessness of love, heartbreak, and death". Meanwhile, Argentine writer Mariana Enriquez's third collection **A SUNNY PLACE FOR SHADY PEOPLE** (out now, Granta) delivers bleak, often brutal horror. We called JM Miro's *Ordinary Monsters* – a kind of Victorian-era riff on *X-Men*, centred on children with special abilities – "richly imagined and masterfully executed"; there's now a follow-up, **BRINGER OF DUST** (out now, Bloomsbury). AM Shine's *The Watchers* was recently turned into a movie by Ishana Night Shyamalan; sequel **STAY IN THE LIGHT** (10 October, Head Of Zeus). continues the story of his protagonist Mina. Suitable for ages 8-15, **DOCTOR WHO: THE ADVENTURES BEFORE** (3 October, BBC Children's) includes eight preludes to TV stories including "Arc Of Infinity" and "Planet Of The Dead". **GODZILLA: THE ENCYCLOPEDIA** (out now, Titan Books) explores the powers and anatomy of over 100 kaiju, with illustrations by monster designer Shinji Nishikawa. Tom Salinksy's **RED DWARF: DISCOVERING THE TV SERIES – VOLUME ONE** (out now, Pen & Sword) covers the first six series, reviewing all 36 episodes and nitpicking continuity errors and the like. Finally, Satoru Stevenson's unofficial guide **THREE, TWO, ONE: LET'S JAM!** (out now, Telos) provides a detailed analysis of *Cowboy Bebop*.



THE WRITE STUFF
THE SFX AUTHOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Susanna Clarke

The writer of *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* has a porcine pal...

SARAH LEE

Do you have any personal mementos or knick-knacks on your desk/within reach?
A friend recently told me, "Soft toys are your angels", and that feels about right. The ones that sit closest to me at the moment are a fox, a pig, a tiny bear and a soft, cuddly Leonard da Vinci. Pig does offer writing advice, but it usually consists of, "I think there should be more pigs in this story."

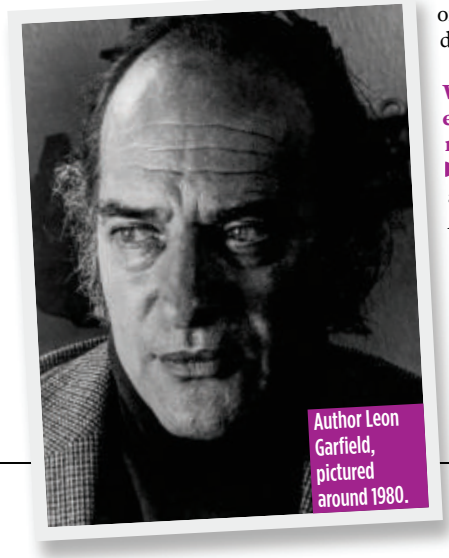
Do you find it helpful to listen to music while writing?
I find the sound of rain very helpful to write to. Also the sound of cafés. Sometimes I'm actually in a café and it's actually raining, but it's not quite enough, so I add extra through my headphones.

Which of your books was the most difficult to write?
Everything is difficult (impossible really) until, inexplicably, it isn't. The hardest part, for me, is always the beginning, trying to work out what – among a mass of material – the reader needs to know in order to care about the story, and the order in which they need to know it.

Do you have any writing "bad habits" that you have to keep in check?
I have to stop myself from explaining everything to the reader. The reader isn't stupid. A lot of writing is just taking things out.

> **"Kazuo Ishiguro: I love what he's doing and I can't work out how he's doing it"**

Were you a keen reader as a child? Which books were your favourites?
I loved historical novels: Leon Garfield, Barbara Leonie Picard, Rosemary Sutcliff. I wanted to escape my life and be someone else, preferably someone in Roman or medieval Britain.

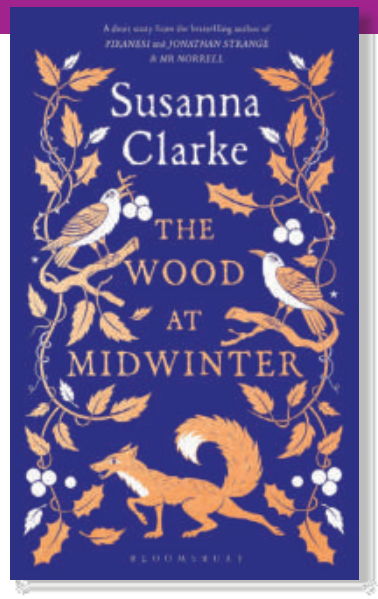

HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY
Author Leon Garfield, pictured around 1980.

I wanted to stand in a frozen winter landscape, at sunset, with a horse, on the verge of doing something noble and tragic.

Is there any particular author whose writing ability makes you envious?
Kazuo Ishiguro: I love what he's doing and I can't work out how he's doing it.

If you could recommend one book that you love, but which is not very well known, what would it be?
I'm not sure how well known it is, but I'm reading *The Goblin Emperor* at the moment, by Katherine Addison. It has a very sweet protagonist-emperor. It's like *The Crown* (the Netflix series), only everyone is an elf or a goblin. This makes less difference than you'd think.

What's the best gift you've ever received from a reader?
Someone in Russia sent me a set of *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* tarot cards, which they had designed. They are so beautiful. The Magician is Childermass; The Hermit is Norrell (obviously); The Emperor is John Uskglass, represented by darkness spilling out of a mirror.



What's the biggest misconception people have about being an author?
That the person who writes the books is the same person who answers questions like these ones.

What's the best piece of writing advice you've either received or read?
"Write in the way you can, not the way you can't."

Susanna Clarke's new short story "The Wood At Midwinter" is out on 24 October, published by Bloomsbury. A 20th anniversary edition of Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell is out on 10 October.

X-MEN

A Summers lease

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
- Publisher **Marvel Comics**
- Writer **Jed MacKay**
- Artist **Ryan Stegman**

ISSUES 1-3 **The reset button** eventually comes to all superhero reboots – even one as daring and successful as the X-Men's "Krakoa Era". The ambitious saga that began in 2019 (with Jonathan Hickman's *House Of X/Powers Of X* series) has finally ended, and now Marvel is following it up with a more back-to-basics approach.

A massive collection of X-related relaunches are coming our way, all under the umbrella title "From The Ashes", and the first is this ongoing title from writer Jed MacKay and artist Ryan Stegman. Here, we pick up the action months after Krakoa's fall, with the X-Men now split into a selection of smaller teams, and the one led by Scott "Cyclops" Summers having taken over a former Sentinel factory in Alaska as their new home base.

These first three issues follow Cyclops and his compatriots as they attempt to get to grips with their post-Krakoa lives and help a new wave of mutants, while also tackling inter-personal conflict and the shadowy cabal of villains plotting against them.

If you think that sounds like business as usual, you'd be right – this is absolutely a return to a more old-fashioned approach that is in no danger of feeling revolutionary or fresh.

However, despite some occasionally clunky examples of exposition and a lack of any Krakoa-style big conceptual swings, it's a lively slice of old-school superheroics that makes up for in pace and energy what it lacks in inspiration.

Despite its massive creativity, the Krakoa era did eventually get too sprawling and complex to easily keep up with, and these issues are (mostly) a much more accessible jumping-on point for new readers.

MacKay packs in lots of action and has fun with the characters, with the unexpected team highlight being the addition of Juggernaut. He also sets up some potentially intriguing ongoing threads – admittedly, largely by hijacking concepts from Grant Morrison's epic early-2000s *X-Men* run.

> "A return to a more old-fashioned approach"

The most essential ingredient here, though, is the art from Ryan Stegman, who goes all-out to give every page a sense of dynamism and cartoony impact. Stegman's characterful exaggeration leans into the strengths of comic-book storytelling, and gives these issues an all-important adrenaline shot. That isn't quite enough to push this opening salvo of "From The Ashes" into must-read territory, but the results are likeable and entertaining.

Even if the days of mind-bending, wildly ambitious X-Men comics are over for now, we shouldn't count these heroic mutants out just yet.

Saxon Bullock

i Stan Lee created the name *X-Men* after his first title *The Mutants* was rejected by Marvel's '60s boss Martin Goodman.

PHANTOM PATROL

★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
- Publisher **Bear Alley Books**
- Writer **Willy Patterson**
- Artist **Gerry Embleton**

COLLECTION **Dubbed "the serial** that's unlike anything you've ever read before!" when it first appeared in the pages of British weekly *Swift* in 1962, *Phantom Patrol* now seems like an endearing product of its era.

It centres on a bunch of British soldiers who are flung back through the centuries after stumbling upon a time travel device. Characters such as Corporal Jock McLuckie and Private Paddy O'Connell conform to national stereotypes, while the group also pick up stray German Erhart, whose constant but ultimately doomed attempts to escape become repetitive.

With the first half of the story mostly set in Ancient Greece and Egypt, Willy Patterson throws plenty of historical details into his scripts, which are evocatively realised by Gerry Embleton. His gritty black and white art still flows impressively, despite the sometimes verbose text often threatening to overwhelm the action.

Taking in several different locations, from the Ice Age to the far future and Elizabethan London, the latter stages are more fun as our heroes also obtain a helmet that allows them to fly – and Fergus, a faithful robot dog who is a forerunner to K-9.

Add an impressive cover from Chris Weston and some informative articles from publisher Steve Holland and you have the perfect blast from the past. **Stephen Jewell**

MARVEL 85TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL

★★★☆☆

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**
Publisher **Marvel Comics**
Writers/artists **Various**

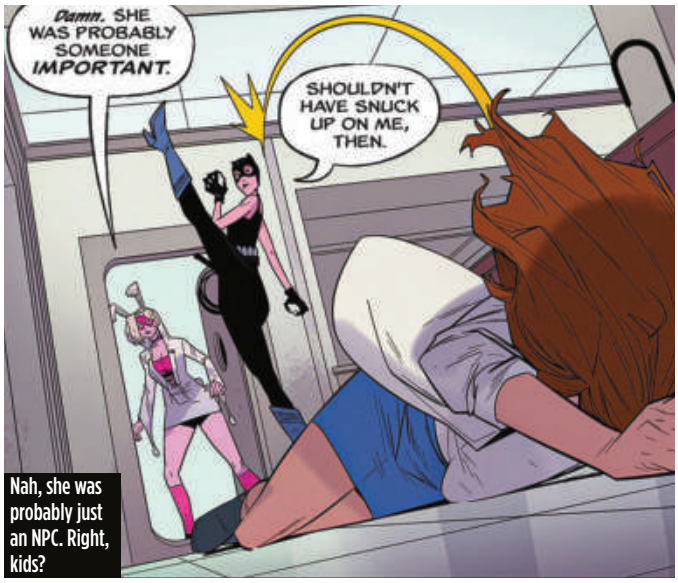
SPECIAL **Commemorating the** eight and a half decades since Marvel forerunner Timely Publications released its first comic, the framing sequence of this oversized anthology takes place in a 85th century museum and features a malevolent alien tour guide who wildly misinterprets the meaning of various ancient superheroic artefacts. Sadly, its imaginative potential is only really realised by Iman Vellani, Sabir Pirzada and Stephen Byrne's opener.

Featuring his trademark fluid linework, Alan Davis's multiverse-spanning Excalibur 10-pager affectionately harks back to not only his original late-'80s run on the UK-set X-book, but also his classic '70s take on Captain Britain.

Meanwehil (Christopher) Priest and Carlos Pagulayan's irreverent "Rush Hour" improbably imbues Peter Parker with a Spider-mobile and strands him in an interminable traffic jam.

The Moon Knight manga of Yuji Kaku's "The Moon Warrior" and Steve Skroce's all-star "Contest Of Champions" prioritise spectacular art over substantial narratives.

Meanwhile, teaming up a well-preserved Wolverine with Deadpool's disembodied head, the linking story includes plenty of witty banter, but comes to a perfunctory conclusion. **Stephen Jewell**



Nah, she was probably just an NPC. Right, kids?

GOTHAM CITY SIRENS

Putting the gang back together

★★★☆☆

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**
Publisher **DC Comics**
Writer **Leah Williams**
Artist **Daniel Hillyard**

ISSUES 1-4 **The original *Gotham City Sirens*** was a 2009 superteam book centred on the unlikely alliance between three of DC's greatest anti-heroes: Poison Ivy, Harley Quinn and Catwoman. While all of these characters have continued to headline their own comics in the years since (and Harley and Ivy are now well-established as one of comics' most beloved power couples), it's surprisingly taken 15 years for a follow-up.

Leah Williams, Daniel Hillyard and Tríona Farrell replace the original creative team of Paul Dini and Guillem March for this four-issue limited series. When a herd of cyborg bison stampede through Gotham City, pursued by a group of topless cowboys, Harley rustles up the Sirens. Somehow this is all connected to the launch of XO Punch (a buzzy new energy drink), and a deadly online game run by the villainous Punchline, another of the Joker's former associates.

> **"This is all sugar-rush buzz and no nutritional value"**

It's clear from the off that the series is going for a sense of irreverent fun above all else. Williams's script is amusingly sparky, while Hillyard's dynamic art and Farrell's bold colouring makes everything leap off the page – visually, this thing is a knockout.

That same ultra-glib tone, however, also means that *Gotham City Sirens* isn't likely to linger long in your memory. The story is incoherent, and both Catwoman and the book's best visual – the Nasty Boys, a pack of psychotic Chippendales, effectively – are oddly underused.

There's certainly mileage in an ongoing *Gotham City Sirens* comic, but – like an energy drink – this version is all sugar-rush buzz and no nutritional value. **Will Salmon**

i Punchline (aka Alexis Kaye) is the leader of the Royal Flush Gang, and made her debut in 2020's *Batman* 89.

FINAL CUT

★★★½☆

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**
Publisher **Pantheon/ Jonathan Cape**
Writer/artist **Charles Burns**

GRAPHIC NOVEL **Over the course** of this 224-page hardback, Charles Burns lovingly recreates passages from the classic 1956 version of *Invasion Of The Body Snatchers* and the coming-of-age drama *The Last Picture Show*. To a degree, the book is an amalgamation of the two. Like Peter Bogdanovich's 1971 film, it follows a group of American high-schoolers; along the way, it deploys eerie imagery echoing Don Siegel's human-duplicating pods.

Which is not to say that *Final Cut* is out-and-out science fiction. Its central characters are making a sci-fi themed Super 8 movie, conceived by the creative but withdrawn Brian, whose sketchbook is full of weird drawings of floating aliens which resemble a melding of brain and heart.

But despite surreal dream sequences, and an undertow of ominosity (Burns's style can make a boulder feel sinister), ultimately this is a collection of snapshots of awkward moments within a friend group: unrequited infatuation and uncomfortable silences; drunken vomiting and sexual discovery.

All the same, sci-fi fans should see their enthusiasms reflected back at them in the work of Brian and his best pal – corny horror shorts with titles like "The Creeping Flesh" and "The Claw". And they may also recognise his struggles to impose himself in reality the same way he can in his imagination. **Calvin Baxter**

CHARLES BURNS

STAR WARS OUTLAWS

X-winging it

★★★☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

Reviewed on **PS5**

Also on **Xbox Series S|X, PC**

Publisher **Ubisoft**

VIDEOGAME **You'd expect a series** like *Star Wars* to have videogame adaptations by the bacta-tank load. But the last decade has seen it frozen in EA-exclusivity carbonite, the licence only recently thawing for other game devs to touch. Ubisoft have scooped it up first, with *Outlaws* promising to be the first open-world approach in a modern sense (don't discount *Star Wars: Yoda Stories*!).

The same publisher is also responsible for the huge worlds of *Far Cry*, *Assassin's Creed* and the recent *Avatar: Frontiers Of Pandora*, so you'd think *Outlaws* would be almost perfectly on target – but not quite.

Plenty of love has gone into constructing this rendition of *Star Wars*' galaxy – enough that even the grumpiest fans will crack a smile. Perfect recreations of all the best alien species wander around every settlement, spouting perfectly tuned Huttese. While graphics can be muddy on PS5, the art design nevertheless shines through, whether strolling the neon-lit metal streets of Mirogana on the new moon Toshara, or speeding across the dunes of Tatooine, Jabba's palace looming on the horizon.

These are great places to wander around. As a scoundrel (a thief, to be exact), Kay Vess has plenty of excuses to send her critter companion, a cross between a cat and an axolotl called Nix, to pickpocket guards, or sit back and play some Kessel Sabacc (a variation of the classic game).

Where *Outlaws* stumbles is, unfortunately, in its core play. Assembling a crew for a heist proves dull at best and clunky at worst, due to lacklustre mission design. As a thief, too often Kay has to awkwardly crouch-walk through an awful lot of instant-fail stealth sequences. As you unlock more skills, these become less annoying, but never entirely annoyance-free (though a recent patch has made these missions less punishing all round).

Bases in the open world at least offer different ways to approach your goals, though most story missions prefer to dump you in prescriptive and linear levels. These areas also mix in platforming, taking more than a few cues from the likes of *Uncharted*, albeit light years behind in terms of fluidity.

Though Kay is no nimble Force-wielder, you can't help but compare her stiff movement to Cal Kestis's in the much more immediately enjoyable *Star Wars Jedi* games. Bin off the main mission to explore, and *Outlaws* is fun enough, but it's too much of a hodgepodge of droid parts to be truly great. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**

i A frozen-in-carbonite Han Solo makes a brief appearance, when Kay Vess pays a visit to Jabba's Palace.

That's a health and safety nightmare right there.

CONCORD

★★½☆☆

RELEASED 23 AUGUST - 6 SEPTEMBER, RIP

Reviewed on **PS5**

Also on **PC** (Well, not anymore...)

Publisher **Sony**

VIDEOGAME **Pulled due to poor** sales a mere 11 days after release, and rendered unplayable three days after that, this Sony-backed shooter deserved so much more. Dull cut-scenes and questionable character names aside (a Thanos and Drax mashup called "Star Child"? Really?), there was actually a lot to love about *Concord*.

The game modes were overfamiliar, in that they riffed half-heartedly on the instantly familiar concepts of Team Deathmatch and Domination. It was the character abilities that brought the experience to life. *Guardians Of The Galaxy* wannabe IT-Z compensated for her low health pool with a projectile that temporarily supercharged her weapon, for example, while Daw could create a safe haven for the team with his healing pads and forcefield.

Passive abilities played a big part in differentiating the characters. Some had an ability tied to their dodge, some were gifted double or even triple jumps, and Haymar could glide through the air. Changing characters was encouraged via buffs triggered each time you chose a new class.

There was room for improvement, but it was *fun*. It was also a game that gave you immediate access to everything (bar some cosmetics) for a single price. After *Concord*'s failure, that's sure to become a rarer sight than ever. **Luke Kemp**

BLACK MYTH: WUKONG

Monkey business

★★★½☆

- RELEASED **OUT NOW!**
- Reviewed on **PS5**
- Also on **PC**
- Publisher **Game Science**

VIDEOGAME **There's so much to** like about this one, an action RPG where you play as one mad monkey. Inspired by 16th century Chinese novel *Journey To The West* (memorably also the inspiration for late–'70s TV show *Monkey*), it sees you bashing your way through glorious boss fights (there are a ridiculous *91* of them to be found).

It is, like every other game these days, heavily influenced by *Dark Souls*, because that is the law. So expect tough combat, bizarre lore, no map screen, and extreme difficulty spikes.

For the most part, however, this is a lot more forgiving than the average Soulslike, thanks to its monkey protagonist being armed with some excellent spells to go with his big hitty stick. You can freeze your foes in time and then enjoy a spree of wonderfully cheap hits. You can create three clones of yourself and gang up on a boss/poor minor enemy. You can create a shadowy decoy of yourself and stroll around the boss giggling as you prepare to smack them in the back. What we wouldn't have given to have had access to these wonderful toys in *Elden Ring*...

> **"It is, like every other game these days, influenced by Dark Souls"**

A Dragon Boss fight. And you thought your boss was bad.

Still, there are problems. The large open environments are certainly pretty, but they're plagued by constant invisible walls, a miserable game design trope we'd hoped had died out a few generations ago.

Levels are also far too repetitive on the eyes, which is a pretty major problem when your game doesn't have a map.

But if you're looking for a more accessible Soulslike with terrific powers, you'll find a fine journey awaiting here.

Abbie Stone

i The plan is for further games in the *Black Myth* series to explore different stories from Chinese mythology.

VAM PD Volume One

The Fang Blue Line

★★★½☆

- RELEASED **31 OCTOBER**
- Running time **169 minutes**
- Format **Download**
- Publisher **Big Finish**

AUDIO DRAMA **Big Finish has** created an all-new vampire franchise with *VAM PD*, a dark comedy drama about two vampire cops whose job it is to keep unruly bloodsuckers in line, and not attract too much human attention.

It stars Juliet Landau as a British vampire, but that's where similarities with her *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* character Dru end – the ancient Catrin sounds more like a psychopathic Lady Penelope. She's partnered by Magnus (Alimi Ballard), a former monk, now hypochondriac vampire, and human liaison Jane (Mara Wilson) for three grisly investigations that introduce us to a richly detailed new vampire universe, in which a lot of what you think you know about the creatures of the night is turned on its head.

The three episodes in this first volume all come from the pen of the ever-reliable James Goss (the writer the Beeb entrusted to novelise the Douglas Adams *Doctor Who* stories), and a lot of fun they are too.

While the first episode goes a little heavy on infodumping (there's a lot of lore to get across), the witty dialogue keeps things lively, and the characters make an immediate impact. It's all good, depraved fun.

> **"Introduces a richly detailed new vampire universe"**

There's a bloodbath at a vampire rave in the opening instalment, followed by shady goings-on at the vampires' international stock market (which trades mainly in blood, obviously) in the second. Finally, a dodgy ritual to create daywalking vampires in the last episode blows a dirty vampire secret wide open.

The pace can be a tad leaden at times, with gags extended beyond their natural life and character-building scenes that drag on way after they've made their point (each episode could probably benefit from being 10 minutes shorter). But stick with it – there's an arc plot promising apocalyptic things to come.

Dave Golder

i Mara Wilson – who plays the vampires' human liaison, Jane – rose to fame as the youngest girl, Natalie, in *Mrs Doubtfire*.

Blastermind
The SFX quiz

ALAN MOORE

He's Britain's greatest comics writer – but do you know the score?

Quizmaster **Nick Setchfield, Editor At Large**

QUESTION 1
Moore's 2016 novel *Jerusalem* is set in his home town – what's the name of that town?

QUESTION 2
Classic dystopian saga *V For Vendetta* first appeared in which monthly British comic title?

QUESTION 3
Moore co-wrote *The Moon And Serpent Bumper Book Of Magic* with which fellow comics writer?

QUESTION 4 Picture Question
Identify this Alan Moore comic, and the artist.

QUESTION 4

QUESTION 5
Name the never-to-be-completed comics project Moore collaborated on with artist Bill Sienkiewicz.

QUESTION 6
Moore's Silver Age-spoofing Image Comics series *1963* actually debuted in which year?

QUESTION 7
Which Alan Moore creation is namechecked in the Pop Will Eat Itself song "Can U Dig It?"

QUESTION 8 Picture Question
Identify the actor behind the mask here.

QUESTION 8

QUESTION 9
Moore's *Doctor Who Weekly* back-up strip "Business As Usual" featured which classic TV foe?

QUESTION 10
Comedy strip *The Stars My Degradation* ran in which British music paper in the early '80s?

QUESTION 11
Alan Moore is a follower of which Roman snake god/glove puppet?

QUESTION 12

QUESTION 12 Picture Question
What's this superhero's alliterative alter-ego?

QUESTION 13
In which century does *The Ballad Of Halo Jones* take place? a) 30th b) 40th c) 50th?

QUESTION 14
In 1999, Moore launched his own imprint ABC Comics. What did ABC stand for?

QUESTION 15
What's the name of the pirate-themed comic strip that runs parallel with the events of *Watchmen*?

QUESTION 16 Picture Question
Name this character, created by Moore with artists JH Williams III and Mick Gray.

QUESTION 16

QUESTION 17
Which of these is *not* a pseudonym used by Alan Moore: a) Curt Vile b) Translucia Baboon c) Maxwell Snazz.

QUESTION 18
Name the graphic novel written in collaboration with Melinda Gebbie which unites the literary characters Alice, Dorothy and Wendy.

QUESTION 19
Moore wrote the *Superman* tale "For The Man Who Has Everything" in 1985 – but which artist drew it?

QUESTION 20
Debuting in *Swamp Thing*, John Constantine drew visual inspiration from which British rock star?

Answers

1 Northampton 2 *Warrior* 3 Steve Moore 4 *The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, Kevin O'Neill 5 *Big Numbers* 6 1993 7 *V For Vendetta* 8 Hugo Weaving 9 The Autons 10 *Sounds* 11 Glycon 12 Mike Moran 13 50th 14 America's Best Comics 15 *Tales Of The Black Freighter* 16 Prometh ea 17 Maxwell Snazz 18 *Lost Girls* 19 Dave Gibbons 20 Sting

How did you do?

Rate yourself by smiley badge

0-5	Grimace
6-10	Frown
11-15	Smirk
16-19	Grin
20	Smile

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SFX

NOVEMBER 2024 | Issue 384

Future PLC, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA

Editor
Darren Scott
darren.scott@futurenet.com

Deputy Editor
Ian Berriman
ian.berriman@futurenet.com

Art Editor
Jonathan Coates
jonathan.coates@futurenet.com

Production Editor
Ed Ricketts
ed.ricketts@futurenet.com

Editor At Large
Nick Setchfield

US Editor
Tara Bennett

Contributors
Calvin Baxter, Dave Bradley, Saxon Bullock, Sarah Dobbs, Rhian Drinkwater, Robbie Dunlop, Richard Edwards, Dave Golder, Stephen Jewell, Luke Kemp, Leila Latif, Clarisse Loughrey, Stuart Manning, Jayne Nelson, Steve O'Brien, Andrew Osmond, Oliver Pfeiffer, Will Salmon, Mark Samuels, Minyi Seo (design), Jack Shepherd, Neil Smith, Abbie Stone, Oscar Taylor-Kent, David West, Jonathan Wright

Film Group, London
Editor Matt Maytum
Art Editor Andy McGregor
Deputy Editor Jordan Farley
Reviews Editor Matthew Leyland
News Editor Lauren Miles

Cover images
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Stock elements: SENEZ, Sergey Ryumin, Getty

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Printed in the UK by William Gibbons & Sons on behalf of Future.

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU
marketforce.co.uk
For enquiries, please email: mfcommunications@futurenet.com

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SFX (ISSN 1358-5959) November 2024, issue 384, is published monthly with an extra issue in December by Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, UK.
Full subscription prices: £71.50 for UK, €158 for Europe, $178 for US, £137 for Rest of World. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA.
Application to Mail at Periodicals Postage Prices is Pending at Brooklyn NY 11256.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to SFX, World Container Inc., c/o BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA.
Subscription records are maintained at Future Publishing, c/o Air Business Subscriptions, Rockwood House, Perrymount Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 3DH. UK

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE

WE HAVE BEEN CHANGED FOR GOOD...

WICKED

PINK *DOES* GO GOOD WITH GREEN!

DUNE: PROPHECY

SHIFTING SANDS OF TIME

SILO

GOING DEEPER UNDERGROUND

NAUTILUS

SET SAIL FOR 20,000 LEAGUES

STAR TREK

LOWER DECKERS ASSEMBLE

PLUS! REBELS! KILLJOYS! LEGENDS!

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BFA / UNIVERSAL PICTURES/ALAMY

All contents are subject to change, following a slanderous campaign by Madame Morrible

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Total Recall

Personal recollections of cherished sci-fi and fantasy

Doug McClure ends up on a Sagoth chain gang.

At The Earth's Core

Andrew Osmond, freelance writer

Watching telly as a kid, I was fascinated and frightened by the quartet of British "lost world" adventure films made in the '70s, directed by Kevin Connor and starring Doug McClure. There were *The Land That Time Forgot* (with dinosaurs), sequel *The People That Time Forgot* (more dinosaurs) and *Warlords Of Atlantis* (gurgling water kaiju). But my favourite was *At The Earth's Core*.

In the magnificent steampunk opening, the manly David (McClure) waves to a cheering crowd and embarks in an experimental drilling vessel to explore underground. He's accompanied by the machine's impeccably gentlemanly inventor, Dr Perry, played – hooray! – by a bespectacled Peter Cushing. This was when Cushing's horror career was winding down, and he reaches back to an old role, another kindly inventor-doctor. Cushing plays Perry so much like his movie Doctor Who from the '60s that it's impossible not to see Perry as the Doctor's ancestor. (Cushing's version was human, remember.)

Naturally, Perry's invention goes astray, landing him and David in the subterranean world of Pellucidar, where the sky is pink (it's supposedly magma), the oppressed humans speak perfect English, and our heroes are greeted by a towering, stomping parrot-monster chasing them through a jungle.

Later they find Pellucidar is ruled by nasty telepathic lizard-birds, the Mahars, who nest in the misty heights of their craggy city and swoop down to carry off sacrificial victims (all women). "They've got to be destroyed!" declares McClure furiously, and the eight-year-old me was right behind him.

The story is hokum, but some scenes have a dreamlike quality that's rare in film today, and McClure's gladiatorial duel with a giant lizard is genuinely exciting. The Mahars' "sub-human" guards could be seen as racist caricatures, but interestingly McClure befriends a black man, Ra (Cy Grant), who becomes the film's most heroic character.

Today I realise that what really made the film is how it sounds: the roars of giant rhino men, the harsh electronic chittering of the Mahars' minions and the piercing hum of the Mahars' telepathy. All that still resonates with me now, like a tremor felt all the way from the Earth's core.

A good patriot, Andrew knows no Mahar can mesmerise him; he's British!

Fact Attack!

→ The film is based on a 1914 book by Edgar Rice Burroughs. A sequel book has his hero Tarzan visiting Pellucidar.

→ It was scripted by Milton Subotsky, who previously wrote and produced both of the *Doctor Who* films starring Peter Cushing.

→ Ra actor Cy Grant was a stage actor, musician and activist. He also voiced Lieutenant Green in *Captain Scarlet And The Mysterons*.

→ The Mahars were small stuntmen in suits, suspended by wires. According to the director, they'd often crash into the walls of the set.

→ Connor and co were keen to adapt Edgar Rice Burroughs's *John Carter* series too, but his estate wanted too much money for the rights.

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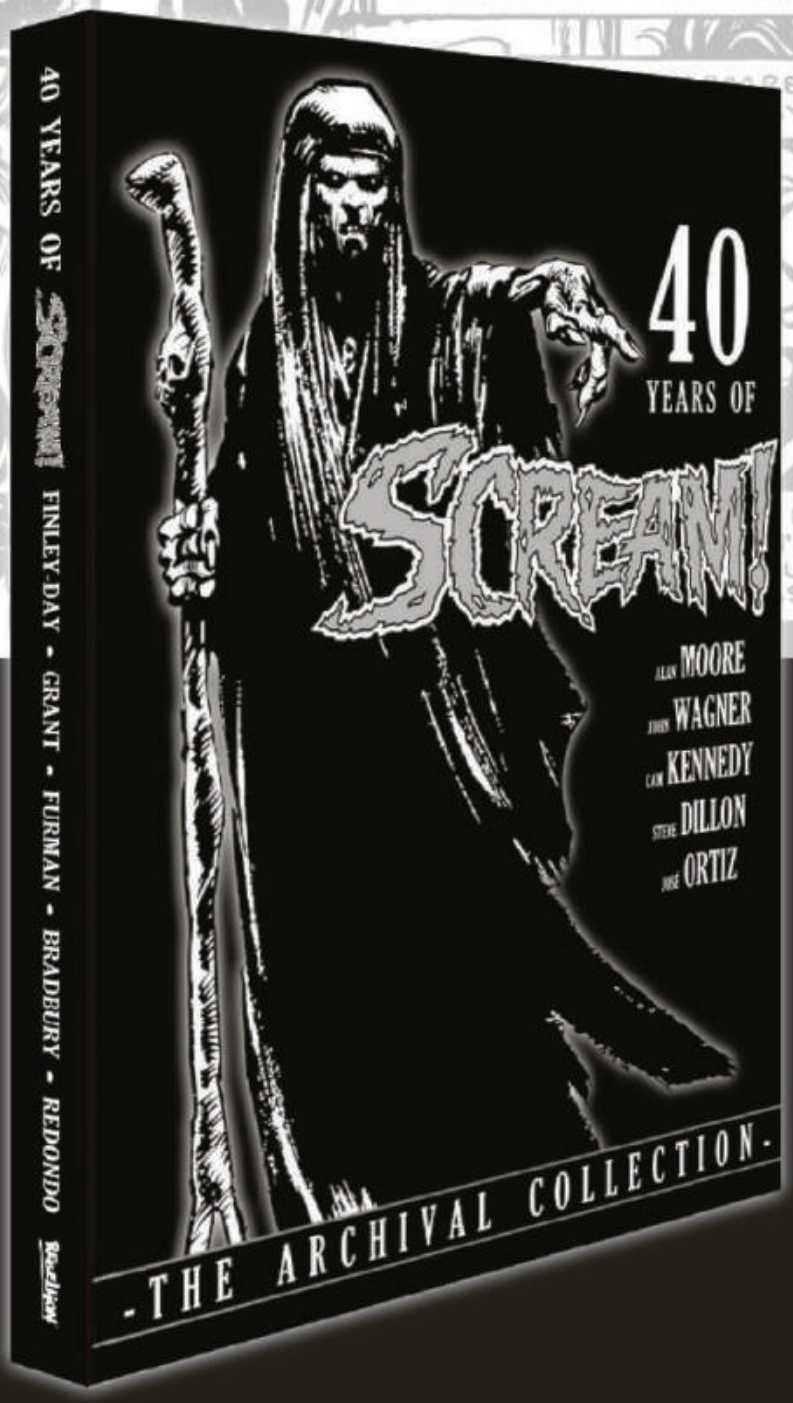
DEFINITELY NOT FOR THE NERVOUS!



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Produced 'from the depths' of King's Reach Tower by the mysterious undead editor Ghastly McNasty, the first issue of Scream! was unleashed on 24 March 1984. An immediate hit with fans, the comic featured strips plucked from the fevered imaginations of British comic-book legends such as Alan Moore, John Wagner, Alan Grant, Simon Furman and Gerry Finley-Day, all beautifully realised by artists including Eric Bradbury, Cam Kennedy, José Ortiz, Ron Smith, Steve Dillon and Jesus Redondo.

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